LAFAYETTE

"LAFAYETTE was what one will, but he was a man, a man of heart. He is the magnificent incarnation of the battleground of reality and the ideal that is in every creature. Victor or vanquished what does it matter? His days were beautiful. If he erred, it was on the right side, on the side of the heart. I do not know that there is a single woman in the world who would dare hold it against him. If he condescended to things, it was always on horseback, yes, on a white horse. Life moves forward at slow march, it analyzes and wavers; he took life at a gallop. Somebody, on July 14th, 1790, seeing him caracoling on the Champ de Mars, cried: 'There goes Monsieur de Lafayette, galloping down the centuries!' "

LAFAYETTE

By JOSEPH DELTEIL

AUTHOR OF

"Joan of Arc," "The Poilus," etc.

LAFAYETTE, "the father of four revolutions," is a figure of such lasting charm and of associations so romantic that one would expect him to be the subject of innumerable biographies. The contrary is the case—he has been curiously neglected; but this is perhaps fortunate, for it was inevitable that Delteil undertake the epos of Lafayette, "discoverer of America" at nineteen, hero of French liberty at thirty, and tragic failure for the rest of his days. The many followers of Delteil's Maid of Orleans and his Soldiers of France will find the same vast epic sweep, the same haunting grace, and the same unique combination of irony and naivetê in his treatment of Lafayette.

Amid a host of urgent, swift figures, Marie-Antoinette, Cornwallis, Washington ("50% will power, 49% reason, and 1% chance"), Talleyrand, Robespierre and Bonaparte form a magnificent background for the "boy" from Auvergne, the general in America, the apostle of liberty in 1789, and the old man, cultivating his roses and dreaming his dreams in the perfumed gardens of La Grange.

"Grace was his, and all the graces."

LAFAYETTE

By Joseph Delteil

JOAN OF ARC

THE POILUS

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Lafayette in 1791

LAFAYETTE

BY

JOSEPH DELTEIL

Translated by
Jacques Le Clercq

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If in future times a Frenchman were called upon to indicate the character of his nation by that of an individual . . . he would pronounce the name of Lafayette.

—John Adams, President of the United States.

PREFACE

"A kind of simpleton," says Chateaubriand. True, quite true. He was neither a great mind, nor an orator, nor a statesman—not even an intelligent man. But this simpleton, this prince of simpletons, did two things: he founded America and he brought forth the French Revolution. He wrote: "I have conquered the King of England in his might, the King of Prussia in his authority, the people in their fury." True again. Strange! What is the secret of this man, the key to his life?

I have made him a pure sentimentalist. He was a great poet, one of the greatest the world has known. Lafayette's life illustrates brilliantly the power (and the limits) of the heart. Therein, he is unique, true brother to Jeanne d'Arc. Lafayette, or the genius of the heart.

Needless to say that, in my opinion, to relate the life of an eminent man is not to report facts and action, but to *invent* his soul.

What I love in a great man is myself. My hero is my "ideal self." Have I depicted Lafayette as he was? I have depicted him as I like him, anyway.

I *admire* Napoleon; I *like* Lafayette.

JOSEPH DELTEIL

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CHAPTER ONE

The Little Boy from Auvergne

" . . . a will-power inherited from the old inhabitants of the mountains of Auvergne."

—Charlemagne Tower.

LAFAYETTE

CHAPTER ONE

The Little Boy from Auvergne

SEPTEMBER, in Auvergne, is a month of mortal splendor. The first violin of Autumn blends with the final fanfare of sap and swelter. It is the season of the equinox, the season of migrations, the season of moulting. Fire secretes its first ash. Passion burnished with melancholy. One fine morning, and almost in unison, as far as the eye can reach, green grows yellow. The last of that line, Summer's leftovers. The landscape, touched with rust, takes on a well-nigh human look. A great air, as it were, of Fatality.

On September 6th, 1757, Marie-Paul-Joseph-Roche-Yves-Gilbert de Motier, Marquis de La Fayette, was born at Chavaniac, in Auvergne. In that cradle, fancy is tempted to drop the first sear leaves, more lovely than the living. All things are symbols. Over this new born head, I find myself looking for

those large simple symbols that Nature evermore stamps and seals on the geometric purlieus of Man.

First, and above all, I look for the star.

For the satisfaction of that spirit, then, Lafayette was a little Auvergnat, born in the Autumn.

Chavaniac is an old manor, lost in the woodlands between Brioude and Le Puy. A court bounded by four blocks of buildings, one for the ravens, one for the snails, another for the crows, and the last for the hop-toads. All about it are oozy ditches, full of bramble-patches and blackberries. Then, to the horizon, the fleecy grazing of the vast forest of Auvergne, the plump glades of chestnut, beech and pine, mysterious, legendary, protoplasmic. . . .

Ideally ample Auvergne, set in the center of France, with the vertebration of its broad simple flanks, the layout of its bleak horizon, its robust immediate firmament: it is more than a province among provinces; it is the very kernel of France. It is redolent of something—what shall I say?—something aerial and stocky, suggestive of bread. Its mountains, full of majesty, develop, at leisure, the soul. The character of this country is centrifugal, all is balance and unity. On an ample base, a steep-pitched space. Auvergne, shaggy and sleek, somber and gay! The certifying climate, the countersigning flora concen-

trate its innate implications. Surly, yet smiling in a hundred health-resorts more nude than maids in April. Fools they are who, oblivious to great lines, quarrel with your big ankles! Red copper on a thousand anvils illumines your thick face. Grave, aye, but not gross nor lumpish, vivid-hued and even elegant, as an oak is elegant. In one word or two, both will and poetry. Witness the birds, witness the sky when of a Sunday, in a broad barnyard, mica-like, you dance the rigadoon.

In this setting, in this mould, Lafayette spent an amazing youth, half yokel and half fey. Here for eleven years he breathed deep, here he found sustenance in an incomparable solitude. Before he was born even, he had lost his father, fallen at twenty-five at the Battle of Minden. He was reared by a trio of female Fates, his mother and two aunts. Easy to picture those two heirlooms, taciturn profiles under the black lace hoods.

His soul is moulded by meadows, horizons and heavens. The man's nature is the hue of his eyes. He is a son of his soil. Tall on the plain, short in the mountains. The milk he drains is gritty or boggy as the soil he treads. The man's whole life is elucidated by his childhood. To his Auvergne, Lafayette owes

two essential traits: his sense of independence and his poet's heart.

From the root, the tree; so man grows. What is man but a point developed? From the root-principle (from the egg), his destiny is writ. Grow now, climb now. . . . To each new need corresponds in the vast universe a neat especial aliment. Between man and the environing world, no solution of continuity. All clings and finds its graft. Desire feeds all. Little Gilbert, day by day, year by year, expands his jagged orb in life. Each tooth claims its prey. Light invents the eyes. Milk breeds pleasure. A tuft of mint, growing on the mouldering drawbridge planks, prompts a world of odor. Pigeons every morning form in his mind the idea: wings. Why stand at all, if not to peer upwards? A ray of moonlight enlarges imagination to all heaven. A storm embodies for this child all strength. Thus the sentiments of man are born, holding Nature's hand.

One day, our baby *invented* joy. He invented joy in a blackberry bush. He had crawled in the castle moat through tufts of eglantine and huckleberry brambles. The sky was softer than his nurse's breast. Grass laved his skin like an April. The heat was round, palpable, well-baked, like a warm breast. The child, coasting, squatting, gorged himself with blackberries. They had crimsoned his hands, blackened

his mouth. Glut, bliss, intoxication swept his body full-sail. He wallowed on the scorching bank, aghast with grass. Smeary berries dangled from his hair, botched his legs. He plucked them by the mouthful now, scratching his face, shining it, laughing, belching. Tiny drunken tot, now God forgive me, bibbing blackberries and beauty, I spy you, spy you in the thickets like some tiny striped Priapus, your black feet jigging in the blue and milky belly open to the sun. At last he fell asleep, in the grassy swelter, crimsoned utterly. . . .

* * *

The first glance that this child, from the terrace-top of Chavaniac, cast about the world, fell on a circle. From the castle, the eye surveys a landscape of wood and sky, both tightly closed. Something geometrical in all perfection chills. Not the least danger of prospects too absolute is that they propose the Beyond. They famish instead of nourishing the soul.

The child's first escape from the castle suggests a flowering. Hitherto he had been living indoors, within human walls. Now he was to penetrate the objective.

As soon as, say about five, his nurse began to take him to the woods, for the first time his heart beat distinctly. Reality suddenly emerged from confu-

sion. Half-orphan as he was, the child entered the forest fearlessly, as into a mother.

The forest! He feels every leaf in his eyes, his veins, his heart. A strange assurance settles on him. Here, here at last, is the home of his being, his promised land. It smells of cool fern, moist sunlight, birds' dung. The air tickles his throat, leaps in his lungs with a healthy ring. Space is dense and rich; hand and eye row through it. No heights, no depths, here, but the center of a perfect equilibrium. You glide between layers of wonders. As water flows, so move you. Everything is alive, the wind with its merl's eyes, the moss with goblin complexion, the sky with branching wings. And young, it is all young, it is all his own age. What manner of communion exists between the soul of man and the shade of the greenwood tree?

From that day on, little Gilbert built his soul a dwelling in the woods. There he spent his vital time. There his little brain grazed. The woods were his school. Certainly, if ever child was raised true to the teachings of Rousseau it was (unawares, by Harry!) little Lafayette. Idyllic solitude, nature with its greenthorn, winged things and water, were his teachers. To them he owed the traits peculiar to his soul: tenderness, idealism, individualism, and a deep thirst for liberty.

For love of his forest the little lad, who later was known as the "father of Four Revolutions" (America's, and ours of 1789, 1815, and 1830) made his first rebellion. His aunts had grown more and more concerned, seeing him so wild, so solitary. Every morning, he was off grazing his thoughts in the greenwood. He hungered and thirsted for birds. They were convinced, old-lady-like, that the woods were ruining his mind. One day their ban fell on the forest.

He howled, kicked, cried. In the yard, his nurse pinioned him with many reasons, with arms galore. She pinioned him, feeble outpost of flesh, but afar the vastness of leaves beckoned, the space vital to his heart. With one leap, he fled her, and ran for his life. But the papquean, dumbfounded for a minute, gave chase with seven league boots. She barred the road of the drawbridge, chased him around the courtyard. The good soul grew goggle-eyed, breathless, growling and be-haloed with gestures. She was all a-sweat now, all a-slobber. They ran around the court thrice. The child flew, a wild thing, his eyes tense. Finally in a corner he was caught between two walls. There, spitting, and clawing, he faced her. Only Heaven knows the energy of an innocent child. He charged her, belaboring her with fists, butting her with his head. With all his little unconquerable

strength he charged and overrode her, skimmed the drawbridge, plunged into the heart of the wood like a bird. His heart was racing so fast that he fled on his heart. . . .

Long he fled, long, no one knows how long . . . till his legs failed, till his body was sapped, to the last gasp. Winded, he collapsed, flopped. . . .

Little by little, tears welled, sweet, melting tears, heart-laving tears, tears of relief. His lungs breathed again, his bones grew limber, his ribs played, his fingers played. The child flowered.

Morassed yet in half-sobs, quarter-sobs, but already on his tear-stained face the tender gleam of heaven, he raised his head to the outgoing world, opened his eyes to the green play of morning. Everything seemed to him cool, affable, sonorous and shimmering.

A leafy vault mothers him. The sun, in large blobs, kisses the squat trunks. In the pied air glittering pollen-clouds hang quivering. Mosquitoes, fairer than gods, dance on the rays. An amorous attitude is in that hour's appeal, a girl's pliant glamour. Trickling scents, trilling, mottle the clearing. Light is a dance, life a ring-round-the-rosy. The fond ardor of air envelops you, fondles you, fishes through your pockets, sways you half-fainting in its fleet lap. A gentian intoxicates space. The soil exhales miracles. Beetles more enamelled than any star pass processional

and slothful down rich paths of dew. Moist spiders spin silk in the mottled gloom. From the hearts of the elder-trees come the sighs of the soft teetering sap. Creation's sample, species upon species, cross the bridges of the sky. Your mouth waters. Veins spread, wings spread. An urge in your heel, martin-hued. Your very entrails valid. . . . Here and there a fly's flight, the cooing of a turtle-dove, are the world's pillared props. A spiralling tomtit mounts round and round a pine, a long wax-sealed pine, tender of bark as any pearl, pecking at the juice of day.

Little by little the child sheds his tears like a skin. He arises, smooth-souled, from his peeled tears. He is lively, undulating, wedded to things. All that fraternal life under the sun: in himself he feels it supreme, identical. He squares himself, open-souled. . . .

Lord! how well these pure surroundings match this young soul! How remote now his ruddy nurse and her great ill-gotten gestures. Nature transubstantiates man.

The child rises. He knows now: he will never return to the château, never again. The château, social life, the life of men—faugh! For his part, he chooses the key to the fields, liberty, the Beyond, dreams. And the symbolic choice in an instructive

instant of an ideal child holds for a whole life. All his life long, as on that sylvan morning, Lafayette was a "waking dreamer."

Idly he wanders, under trees full of spells. He hungers for heaven, for liberty, for an absolute that space alone can satisfy. Firmly he strides—strides—already, as it were, on his way to America. . . .

He crosses crowded dales, naked valleys, meadows girt with ditches, knolls crowned with ash, banks of sand, roaming with the wild shy lope of the lone. Health is his in this vegetal world. Ah! those wanderings through shining, healthful woods, in a luminous and simple reality! The first strawberries beckon for a kiss. He sips water in liquid gleaming fingers. He roams, roams through his soul's country, spellbound, and the atoms of the day on all sides form his escort and his panoply.

He is standing by a brook, on the pebbles. Yonder, on a chalky hillock, between screens of dwarfish heather, is the rabbits' dance-floor. Four little blue-gray bunnies, light as butterflies. They hop, gravely thrilling, now erect, now spinning top-like in an hallucination of light. In this witching scene, where water weds heaven with a nuptial ring of green, under the sheer shafts of light, wee rabbits exchange wee thoughts. They dip their ears, horizontally, they perk their mustaches, they laugh, Lord! how they laugh

their strange lunar laugh, white as clowns. They line up for a quadrille, face to face, advance with springing rumps and courtly bows, fold fraternal paws, wheel suddenly, waddle, do a dainty goose-step, scratch their buttocks, noses in air. One, two, three, one, two, three, giddily they waltz, then abruptly halt, shimmering in the sun. Thus, with tails lily-pale, with eyes dream-deep, with endless grimaces, incessant simpers, with nimble passes and flaming curtsies, with carp-like leaps, and four paws in air, the little blue bunnies dance on the green.

Gilbert whistles. Four flying leaps. Four runaway tails. Gone. And he laughs, laughs, laughs!

On again. To-day, drifting, our little idealist sees nothing but ideal sights. No, Nature is no tomb. No trace of death on her bosom, no cemetery of beasts. Even in the act of passing, matter revives, fresher and more rosy-red. Nature knows the "great secret" of which Mistral speaks:

"And the great secret men forget
Is but this: Death is life yet."

Further, a humming slope of bees. The sun is now at zenith. A vapor muffles mounds and sandbanks. On the horizon a croft with silver walls stands in a

posy of soft lindens. The bees swarm in the trees, the hawthorn boughs, over the soil strewn with fern and wild thyme. In the sky they make a skyey din. The ear hums mellifluous with them. An angel swarm, you'd say.

In a bushy path, he meets a shepherd girl with her basket. Both stop, smiling silently. The little girl is toying with an acorn-cup. Her bare legs are well-nigh palpably pink. Her mouth is a great gulf. And she smells of goat's cheese. They look at one another, she, guileless drop of flesh, he celestially translated, as all his life, *sensitive and without senses*. . . .

Everything to-day takes on the smooth shape of happiness. A hedgehog startled by the child is flowery as a barberry-bough. And his snout, idyllic pink, on this plumed path, peers and points, like the promise of the future.

There are ants along a mole-hill, to-and-fros of coleoptera on a cracking soil, flights of jays in the sassafras, a squirrel on the go, a whole world dappled and shining, a whole population tenacious and veracious.

But now, slowly, fatigue, heat and hunger numb the young spirit. Or rather numb his body still so tender and earth-twinned. He lies flat in the sunny shadow. Motionless, he sleeps a flower's sleep. He dreams—what? He starts up bewildered, rises like

an i. Off he tramps once more over the burning land of Auvergne, his heart burning.

Noon, the reptiles's hour. . . .

Now is the hour when adders lie in wait for lizards on warm slopes, lovely lizards with azure tails. Here is one. Fresh from his hole under the stone. Sprawling on all fours on dry gravel, there where most it shines. The universal sun distends his skin, swells his belly. With all his heart wallowing in life, in the lee of the chalky cliff under the leaden sky. His eyes, drunk with heat, leveled on the void, pale and empty, dilate like globes. His throat, tenderer than doves', his ocellated throat, throbs with pleasure, in little gasps, panting, naked. The heat grows, two-fold, three-fold. That rocky fastness beams like a furnace. The beautiful green lizard, dull with voluptuousness, dozes in the beatific clarity of day.

This is the moment that Dame Adder, lurking round a filbert tree, has been waiting for. She puffs her neck, braces her coils, points her head, and with one swift-glide, one long hiss of pins, falls on the lizard. By what guess, what golden sense did he, at that very moment, feel and foresee her? With one leap, he dodges the blow, scurries across the country at breakneck speed. Barely baffled, she gives chase.

Over valley, over furrow, over rubble, over dust, runs the classic chase of prey, with its gasps, its ghastly fever, its great epic gait. The lizard a green gleam, the adder a black glide. The powers of evil and malignity against those of flesh and bone.

Two racing gleams. And ever that hissing of the adder, that high shrill hiss on coils and blades of Asia and Sahara. Two dumb things, prey of heat, fear and famine, nature in them voiding her utmost pains, all malice drained, all sails flying, run, over cracking pebbles, through the cloven grass, frantic, fuming, their hellish hideous race. The landscape dreams and meditates, in "alarming" silence. Is some law at stake?

But at last the poor lizard falters. Cowed with fate and fear, a strange paralysis, the numbness of conviction, foils his members, the free play of his being. His green heart throttles under his magnetic skin. Torpor, a bastard torpor, void and transcendental, overtakes him relentlessly. He all but fails, and with wide appealing eye calls the vast mute world in witness. Interval, one moment, like a gong. Bit by bit the lizard swoons. His poor beast-brain drains under the sorcerous sun. He hugs the ground, and, behind him, the adder gains each inch he loses. She skims the soil, horizontal and infinite. Gaining every moment, the old instinct of the chase gives her wings.

She flies in long gleams, on the furrow's rim, in the rubble, a swift spasm, agile, shining like a lark. And those two dumb things galloping across a dead immensity, under a raging sun, take on legendary value; a blind cavalcade of souls, an apocalyptic course, something like a sublime conflict of first principles, now a death struggle.

A death struggle . . . for the adder has reached the lizard. Dancingly she enfolds him (vain that last stand of the plucky prey, rehearsing Nature's lesson to the lees, vain that ludicrous last movement of revolt, vain those tiny claws against victorious jaws) she hugs him with hiss and coil, smothers him with heat and death, moulds him yearningly with forked tongue, in an embrace fraught with caresses, amid a hideous chant of triumph. And all the while that pale incantatory head, bald, sneering, and golden (Oh, the peeled look of saurians, of vultures!) rivets and contemplates her prey in an hallucinating teetering sway. It is over. The lizard, a soft spasmodic rag, lies dead. And dame Adder deploys to swallow him, engulf him, her whole gaping jaw unhinged, a huge sweltering two-hour meal to be followed by a two-day nap of digestion, a fantastic bursting deglutition, which to the eye of heaven has the charm, the development, the significance of a sort of weird, oriental, mythic cradle-rocking.

The startled child pales. Good and evil; ill as yet he navigates their channel. But at the sight of that cruel play of hunger and death, that terrible law of the belly, his heart rebels. Through such phenomena, rudely breaking the harmony of his pure inner world, the lad already sees the hairy ears of Robespierre and Marat; he recognizes the very motive of the Terror. In his innocence, in that mysterious world he cries:

"Good is Life; Evil Death. . . . "

CHAPTER TWO

Marie-Antoinette

CHAPTER TWO

Marie-Antoinette

ALL her life, Marie-Antoinette detested Lafayette. Her hatred of him was static and stark; it was a sort of physical hatred, tooth and nail. . . . This deep aversion, heart and soul, is doubtless one of the most minute and absolute causes of the turn the Revolution took in its larger phases. It is one of the keys to History. At various critical junctures, an agreement between the Court and Lafayette would have saved the situation; it would have freed and isolated whatever was worth saving. But Marie-Antoinette steadfastly refused to accept the collaboration and the services, even though indispensable, of the pure "Liberal." Why?

At the age of eleven, Gilbert was sent to Paris for his education. He left Auvergne amid much excitement. The journey by coach, stage upon stage through a brilliant portion of the world, raised him to the seventh heaven.

In Paris, he was entered at the Collège du Plessis, in the Rue Saint Jacques. The place was worse than

a manor: the chill building oozed melancholy and soot, drew tears from the marrow of his bones. College life, at that period, with its ducking in the pool of Latin, its catching of classical fleas, its logic and its metaphysical theology, was scarcely calculated to delight a child. To study Homer is a curious way to sow wild oats. Soon the child preferred the freshness of Jean Jacques Rousseau to the tedious old epic flapdoodle.

One day a bewigged old proctor caught him reading the best-seller of the day behind his worm-eaten desk. I daresay the book happened to be the *Nouvelle Héloïse* instead of Saint Augustine's *City of God*. Our disciple of Héloïse was sentenced to copy out five hundred lines of Horace.

But there is a compensation to everything. The uniform of the Collège du Plessis was a very smart one. It consisted in a suit of marine blue, with rainbow facing, and a tango-colored cap. Obviously there is nothing in coarse cloth to catch a mother's eye. Children are the ornaments of families.

Gilbert fell very short of docility to any test. The curve of his humor bore him too high. His nature, rectilinear and absolute, played discipline more than one trick. It is said that when he was in the Classe de Rhétorique, or, in his Senior Year, the drawing teacher gave a model horse as subject. Gilbert imme-

diately conceived a fine, broad-chested, rebellious horse, with his tail in the air and with triumphant nostrils, a horse like his own heart. Freedom was already the ideal of this limpid and natural heart.

Soon young Gilbert's mother died and the child, already fatherless, was left alone in the world. His taciturn nature grew the more serious. He had been tending every day since his birth towards individualism, as naturally as a river flows to the sea. It is difficult for an orphan to conceive the social idea. Mothers are the founders of society.

At the age of twelve, Gilbert entered the Regiment of the Black Musketeers. Being, at this period, a little nobleman, he went to the military state as a matter of course. The nobleman is born to the career of arms. For what is the spirit of aristocracy if not the spirit of conquest? Every man with a keen soul dreams naturally of aggrandizement. Conquest is the truest instinct of child or man. He aims to conquer power (material and moral power, moral power by means of material power). How was this to be achieved? In the Eighteenth Century by virtue of arms; in the Twentieth, by virtue of business.

The uniform of the Black Musketeers sits upon this child like a carnation. It is a suit of scarlet cloth, embroidered with gold, and, over the shoulder, a great blue cloak with a cross of yellow silver. The only

black thing in the uniform of the Black Musketeers is a man's black hair.

For five years, then, the child played battledore and shuttlecock between college and barracks. He abandoned his Latin themes for a Course in Military Strategy and he was guilty of infidelity towards Virgil with a tall black steed. And he was often on parade at the Reviews.

At the age of sixteen, the Marquis de La Fayette was presented at Court. The Court was redolent of the flesh of woman, of the harpsichord and of wit. It was a band of young men and lovely ladies playing games of bagatelles and of the heart. The air was light and heels were redder than roses. Society bore a perfume of alcoves. Here Love wore a smile on his lips and the business of pleasure went clad in the habit à la française. Nothing was weighty and a woman weighed less than nothing. Fantasy preened and strutted like a peacock. These dresses seemed to be made for the theater, these feet for men's lips, this flesh for the naked eye. The century was gallant with a nuance of state. Here people caressed the intelligence without ivory towers and no one stopped the sun for the sake of carnality. The "chosette"—the light, dainty and airy, delicate thing above all. Mouches on every cheek bore wings and winged were the queues of dandies. Ladies-in-waiting received

lessons in the art of kissing, and, if people danced, it was the body's pleasure. Nor were the abbés unwelcome; nothing prepares for the act better than a ready tongue. If the devil showed his nose, no belle but would go mad over him. A swing as it flies by kindles the flame of bonfires. If the need arise, the fan is not without it uses. A sigh, after all, does not create an upheaval. Nor did the point of a breast ever cause the death of any one in the world. Come, now, above the garter: good hunting! The worst that could happen is to be a cuckoo.

This court was divided into two factions: the old bores and those *less than thirty*. The youngsters sported new ideas and new costumes. English fashions were all the rage in France. As always, the oldsters grumbled.

At the head of the youngsters' faction was the Queen, Marie-Antoinette. By her side were the Comtesse Auguste d'Arenberg, the Duchesse de Fronsac, Madame de Simiane, the Comte de Provence, the Comte d'Artois, Monsieur de Guéméné, Monsieur de Durfort, Monsieur de Coigny, the two Dillons, the two Ségurs. This mad company used to meet in an old inn, *The Wooden Sword*. Here they supped, and danced, and made love. The Duc d'Orléans had just brought back the fashion of drunkenness from England, and, in the highest society, people drank hard.

International Cup matches were played between the French and the British.

One evening Lafayette, chancing to be in this company, wagered that he could drink ten bottles of champagne; he got drunk as a pig. At the moment, he was quite proud of his exploit. While he was being carried home, he did not cease to repeat: "Don't forget to tell Marie-Antoinette how much I drank."

But on the morrow, this episode disgusted him. He felt an aversion for this pretty company. Moreover, there was nothing about him calculated to make him find favor or pleasure in it. He was, at this period, a tall red-haired young man, timid, gauche and clumsy.

This child, running to seed early, and covered with pimples, had nothing sparkling in him. His taste for meditation gave him an artificial carriage. A certain astonishment floated through his wide, candid eyes, of too pale a blue. Everywhere he found himself ill at ease, his spirit on red-hot coals. He danced little and badly. He spoke scarcely at all. In a word, he had nothing in him of the Court fop.

Now side by side with this frivolous society of petulant and libertine people, there co-existed an élite, during this century, gaining gradually in strength, an élite of serious and upright minds who saw the abuses and computed their consequences, who exam-

ined the tree and saw what fruit it bore. In every detail that touches their critical effort, the philosophers accomplished an efficient and just work. Whether one will it or no, a Rousseau dispelled the "vapors" of the Ancient Régime. Once this was accomplished, the fresh rise of new ideas was mere child's play. The falling rain raises the wheat.

If Lafayette was silent, it was, he said, "because he heard almost nothing that seemed to bear repetition." If his manners "adapted themselves neither to the graces of the Court nor to the pleasures of a supper," it was because these graces and these pleasures were a plank over the abyss. If he was a dreamer, he was dreaming of the Revolution.

The eve and morrow of cataclysms are rich ideological fields. The critical sense pullulates in the fields of blood. There exists, around events, a zone of chiaroscuro, sometimes quite vast, where man feels ill at ease. Foresight is the counterpoise of memory.

Under the false roses of pleasure the generation which was twenty years old in 1789, lived a youth more fickle than clouds of gold. Temples crowned with myrtles paled visibly in proportion as the song took a sharper and sharper tone under a sky growing lighter and lighter. There is nothing more filled with anguish than certain dances if the youths display too dense an ardor. Around their brilliant eyes

and their profound brains, the younger generation of 1780-1789 bore that nimbus which is the symbol of predestination. Just as in 1820, just as in 1920, so there was in France in 1780 the *mal du siécle*, the disease of the age. Lafayette had this *mal du siécle.*

He made his way through this system of pastimes and diversions with a solitary step. Forced, by his rank, to appear there, he promenaded down these perfumed walks a soul more melancholy than evening. Sadness and the cares it creates are never more voracious than in an adolescent of seventeen. Hunger, at this age is more beautiful than love.

Seventeen!—the age of marriage. One fine morning Gilbert in a dream married little Adrienne d'Ayen, aged fourteen. A marriage of birds. . . .

The sound of violins fits the aspect of the ideal like a glove. In the gilding which man lends to adult objects, he savors with a delight an indefinable hint of headiness. Headiness, readiness: such assonances have never seemed to me fortuitous. There is an instinct in language just as there is one in the womb of the universe.

In these times, brilliant with pleasure, no doubt young Lafayette distinguished the signs and even the rhythm of some strange correction. The movement

of the senses tends of its own weight towards the very cadence of parturition. The same canal gives issue to the fires of the flesh and to the spoliation of the soul. When man screams (and woman) the times are near.

That he suffered for his lack of grace in this world of immaculate and faultless courtiers is a fact worthy of emphasis. The movements of a soul still soft are ruled upon the picture of the world. Life, for an adolescent, is the wall of a tennis-court; it is his heart he volleys.

Alone with his heart in this world of libertines, what isolation for a child who, at the age when a youth sows his wild oats, knew no pleasures other than those of argumentation. At the age of fifteen to have played a hand or two in the old game with women frees a man; it purges and liberates his soul. The gulf between this dissolute society and the pure adolescent, alas! as in high places where the air is rare, no bridge can span. He attended the pageant of his century—but he stood off-stage.

People saw him, they caught a glimpse of him, between two doors at the end of the vista, always distant, always fleeting, and volatile. And always impromptu, almost importunate. If he entered the ball, and at its most acute moment, it was like a cloud. At the hour when the game caught fire, he passed by,

frigid, freezing. Shadow, silence, mirage, perhaps, his unwonted figure appeared and disappeared in the eyes of the "red heels" with a disquieting alternation. Mystery hung over him like a presage. By dint of seeing him pass, to and fro, in the corners of her thoughts, in the secret of her pastimes, on the horizon of her ballets, everywhere, and everywhere mute and bitter, Marie-Antoinette was seized with a sort of fright (in which perhaps a hint of admiration entered) for this sinister beardless Hamlet, with his unscathed and cold air, with his profile like a bird of death. This ghost inspired her with a sort of attraction, mingled with repulsion, which is characteristic of the owl. He irritated, fascinated and terrified her. In her pleasure-loving eyes, little by little, this young man of evil augury assumed the aspect and brilliance of a hallucination.

She undertook to conquer him.

Marie-Antoinette—what a pretty child it was in this age of love! Tall, high on her stem as a lily, within her carriage that air which is like flight, her arms half-dancing and her feet light. . . light. . . Blond as larks are, she shoots out of history like a projectile of grace. Healthy and ardent, she holds her graces at her fingers' ends like smiles. An angelic and sensuous coloring touches her delicate face. Under her bold Viennese brow two eyes waltz the waltz

of the blue. Around her pupils, the pale radiance of the stars of the sea. The libertine and robust brilliance of an August plum! Ah, the admirable terra firma of that body, polished and repolished by desire and care. The thought of love explodes on her complexion and a proud voluptuousness swells her breasts that cry out to the touch. On that mouth, full to perfection, kisses find a vast and easy foothold. She breathes pleasure from her pearly large nostril. A fine steed with the neck of a swan! Muscle? Fie, fie —scarcely a network of flesh! Scant hips (at least visible) but a figure like a poplar swaying in the double breezes of the heart. How she shines, how she flowers, smoother than silence! And how bewitching she is with her breasts like cups and her head on the end of a pike!

To conquer him? Marie-Antoinette's battle-field is Trianon.

The sun wears yellow gloves, and in the trees the musked birds sing in period style. For we are at Trianon. The Hameau, all veined with straw and so Viennese between the lines, bursts forth in the grove. The brooks are filled with sprites. A band of gay bare-armed shepherdesses frolic. On the meadows, or in the shadow of purple hedges. One of them, in a dress of striped Indian silk, is Queen of France. The

others bear the names of Polignac, Arenberg, Coigny, etc. . . all the jeunesse dorée. They skip rope, or play flying pigeon, shining and amber-colored. One of them, lying on the high grasses, her blue slipper to heaven, sucks her thumb as she dreams. Another is seated by the side of the pool, burning, her thighs opened to the water-lilies. Still another, her skirts lifted above her waist, climbs a virgin chestnut-tree with legs and nails. Some of them, in the chequered glade, are playing games with hearts of sawdust. Everywhere the mingling of the vegetal and the feminine is a delight. Bursts of flesh sparkle through the barberry-bushes. The skin of shoulders is bound to the bark of young plane trees. The sky secretes a special zephyr for these tall girls with sun-browned necks. Nakedness gilds the sun. Yonder, fat cries emerge from tufts of reeds. Long voluptuous laughter begarlands the whole forest. One hears a blackbird in fire, the jangle of cow-bells. Away in the background by the side of the Mill, the Princesse de Lamballe, with long negligent hand, throws roses to the swans.

But suddenly, through the leaves, appears a troop of gallants: the Comte de Provence, the Comte d'Artois, brothers of the King, the Dillons, the Noailles, Guéméné. To-day, Lafayette is with them. They gallop and scamper, kicking their heels up, towards Marie-Antoinette.

She is busy combing her lamb Mouche. Kneeling before the animal, she combs its oily, camphorated mane with long sweeps of her tortoise-shell comb. Indolent, all embalmed with grease of wool, Mouche bleats and the Queen, with her bare hand, taps her snout, with little musical taps. She knots a wide royal-blue ribbon about its neck. Then she embraces it, taking it deep in her arms; drunk with wool, she kisses its two cheeks and away! . . .

From there they go to the cows. There are three of them, streaked, pasturing in the crooked pasture. "Here, Lise!" She calls. Lise approaches, priest-like, her great eyes quite flat.

Artois, the life of the crowd, brings a bowl of Sèvres porcelain. "No," says Marie-Antoinette (here they call her Marion), "a bowl, a common bowl!" The cow chews its cud, eternally, its horns holding up the heavens. Crouching beneath its belly, Marion hilariously scratches its hair with an immaculate finger-nail, with malice in her finger tips. She feels its udders, its red, streaky, libidinous paps. Here is the bowl. Marion fills it with milk—her tongue skims the creamy surface—and she passes it around her at arm's length. She milks the animal with her whole palm, without that subtle jerk of the thumb which is the sign of the true milkmaid. They vie with each other in drinking, their lips hot. As for

Marion, huddled beneath her animal daïs, her hair grazing the hairy belly, and all agleam with drops of milk that have fallen on her arms and dress, she roars with laughter. The thick heat of the cow over her creates a bestial halo about her head. . . . It is now Lafayette's turn. For a moment she glances at this tall, stiff young man, so mysteriously silent. An insane inspiration invades her. Parting her waist with one finger, she presses the bowl against her bare breast, with one single glance of pleasure; then she fills it, and, tremulous, offers it to Lafayette. . . .

"Thank you, Madame, but, as a matter of fact, I do not drink milk."

She arises, out from under her cow, crimson and abrupt. She throws the bowl on the ground. A long trickle of milk enamels the sloping meadow. She flees, her teeth chattering, her feet pointed. Her woodland court follows her. Lafayette remains alone, empty. . . .

The mad band trots through the meadows, red heels flying in the wind. Artois, sparkling and witty, whispers consolation in Marion's ear. Suddenly: "Shht!" They hear a cricket in the grass. All of them silent, their hearts turned to the notch *Stop*. The cricket, hushed for a moment, sets off once more the louder. "We will get it," Artois whispers through his teeth,

squatting down in the grass. "Against the wind!" Squatting and tickling the ladies, they advance, towards the nostalgic and fatal song. The cricket sings right by the edge of his hole. At the slightest alarm, down to the bottom of the hole with him! A thousand silences, myriads of ruses are required to locate his somewhat scattered song. And the agility of a bird to leap on him and seize him by the waist. They draw near. But, of a sudden, one of the ladies gives a cry. . . . Finished! The cricket has gone in again. Artois, vexed, feels the grass. At last he discovers the hole—an oblique, shining, ring-streaked hole. Every one stands around the Comte d'Artois in a circle. Kneeling, he tickles the hole delicately, with a long gramineous stem, he probes deep. . . . and some mad child behind him tickles his ear. But he, shaking off the tickler as a bull shakes off a gad-fly, remains there, attentive, meticulous, turning his straw corkscrew-wise between his thumb and index finger. At last he rises, furious. Nothing to do about it: the insect is out of his reach. There is only one way to catch him: to flood the hole, "Water!" cries Marion. "Don't worry," says Artois, "I can arrange that!" With one hand, he sketches a vague gesture towards the ladies as though making a screen. The ladies grow rosy and shake with laughter. The hole overflows; and, utterly dazed, almost blinded, his cara-

pace streaming, the cricket emerges. Artois seizes him, rises proudly:

"Here he is!"

And all those graceful hands applaud his prowess.

Is it not fascinating, and in keeping with the vast laws of the universe, that every moribund society falls back to a certain extent into childhood?

Meanwhile Lafayette has made for the Mill, over by the Grand Lac. He unmoors a boat. He floats languidly over the surface of the waters. . . .

Marie-Antoinette, stealthily, follows him out of the corner of her eyes. With the cricket on her finger, she drags the whole band to the edge of the lake. The men unmoor the boats, they all jump in helter-skelter. "Up and at this dreamer!" cries Marie-Antoinette. What a pretty *Embarkation for Cytherea*, with boots off, with fine crystalline cries! "Grapple with them!" cries Marie-Antoinette. They all make for Lafayette pell-mell. As they pass, they give him a broadside of boat-hooks. The women throw handfuls of water at him. He replies, faintly. They push his boat towards a cove, near the Temple of Love, they back him up against it, they throw him ashore. . . . He jumps on the ground, stunned by the skirmish, almost cheered-up. The whole crew

disembarks. They fall down in the grass in a body, helter-skelter. Weary (to die of laughter!), the women stretch themselves, panting, quartered, their teeth to heaven. Heats variegate the meadows. Hearts beat horizontal. At the top of the hillock, like the key to a vault, rises the Temple of Love. . . .

Marie-Antoinette sits near Lafayette. The lawn is planted with dwarf blackberry-bushes, with ferns, with honeysuckle. Melancholy, she picks a blackberry and nibbles at it for a long time. Lafayette, supine, allows a long inert arm to hang down by her side. His whole rectangular wrist shines softly, with its twin tendons in relief. Marie-Antoinette looks at this fascinating, pearly, bare wrist, filled with the palpitation of its arteries; she looks at it vaguely, sensually dazzled. As for the rigid young Auvergnat, he dreams, rigorously, he awaits he knows not what, a cry from his entrails, a trumpet call. For seventeen years he has been awaiting his Destiny. And the Queen, for her part, feels her Destiny there, beside her, in this clumsy, amazing body, in this original and mysterious spirit, charged with potentiality and futurity. What thunderbolt does that white motionless wrist hold in store for her? Being a woman, she is attracted practically through the channels of the flesh towards the unknown and the tragical. And love, the

greatest of unknowns. Mechanically, the Queen's hand alights upon the male wrist. Lafayette does not move, lost in who knows what mirage, made insensible by who can tell what cerebral prodigy? Slowly, brilliantly, Marie-Antoinette bends over that miracle of a wrist, flashing like a hunting-mirror, she kisses it, with the merest tendrils of her lips. He does not budge. She smiles. That wrist under her hand throbs like the heart of a tree. About them, everything has become hushed; these bodies, allayed, barely make a vague rumor like ants in the salty grass. Yonder, the plashing of the boats on the lake.

Marie-Antoinette smiles. She has picked a blackberry, a very ripe, black blackberry, and, pressing out the juice between her Austrian fingers, she writes, she traces over the naked wrist marvelous, velvety, crimson characters. The letters come out of a dream, by themselves. Here is a J with a lordly tail, an E easy as the breeze, a T like Toi. . . . The apostrophe, just over the nerve. Then an A, twice crossed; an I. . . . The blackberry is finished. Pensive and celestial, she contemplates these strange letters that have emerged, haphazard out of what hot subsoil? JE T'AI. . . . Slowly she picks another blackberry. A lustrous, almost bloody juice trickles down her fingers. She writes. Here is a majestic M. . . .

With a start, every one rises. The King!. . . .

Louis XVI arrives on the run, panting, excited. "Gentlemen, a great piece of news. America has just declared its independence. It claims its freedom." Independence, freedom: Lafayette awakes from his deep protoplasmic dream. He looks at his wrist, with the legend JE T'AIM. . . . He looks at Marie-Antoinette, idiotically, without understanding. Senselessly. Independence, freedom: the words beat the devil's tattoo in his ears. He arises, erect and sure now. A sudden wave of intoxication makes him taller. He strikes sparks amid this flock with its pastel colors. He cries out: "*Liberté. Vive la Liberté!*" And he strides off, with great steps, half mad, alone and splendid; he strides off. . . . to America!. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Discovery of America

To-day—virgin, quick with life and beautiful.
—Mallarmé.

CHAPTER THREE

Discovery of America

LIFE held a lofty Destiny in store for this tall lad, avid and empty, completely master of his future. Nature holds nothingness in horror, and, the emptier a man is, the greater his weight. Just as little girls caress their future children in the dolls they handle, so young Lafayette stroked the flanks of his Fortune in his sulky solitude.

While the old world was amusing itself, and cracking—yes, precisely like the picture, the *Embarkation for Cytherea*, with its flesh all cracked by time—yonder, on the other side of the ocean, a people, young and fresh as a flower was opening its eyes and creating hands for itself with splendid amazing gestures. Desire at its birth is filled with stars. And desire, in the heart of a people, has liberty for root.

(Indeed, there is something sensual in that passion for liberty throughout an entire century, the Nineteenth; the phenomena of revolution throughout Europe in 1848, for instance, are very similar to the ardors of love.)

The thirteen colonies founded by England in North America felt, all of a sudden, starved for liberty. The thing was born out of nothing, as usual. The Mother Country had just imposed new taxes (stamps, glass, paper, tea, etc). The creation of these taxes, which, incidentally, were not heavy, brought the entire *colonial* principle * on the carpet. Is a colony a parcel of the motherland at the Antipodes, consanguineous and identical, or is it a possession, a conquest? On this occasion, for the first time, humanity attempted to elucidate the notion of colony (and, moreover, elucidated it at the point of the sword.)

Reason, of course, lay on the side of America. It would seem that there are two distinct stages in the type-development of a colony: the conquest period, during which there reigns a sort of *state of war*, with a *temporary* abolition of the customs and laws of civilization; and the normal period, when the colony must stand on an equal footing with the motherland.

It is certain that the concept of colony (which has replaced the concept of slavery) necessarily implies this end. Any protectorship aspires to its end. Rome understands this thoroughly and has struck out resolutely by creating yellow and Negro episcopates. It

* In the case of America, we must always speak of principles. It is well-known that the entire misunderstanding about the War Debts arises from the fact that Europe makes it a financial question whereas America makes it a question of principle. (*Cf.* Joseph Delteil, *The Poilus*, p. 114.)

is because England treated these elementary distinctions clumsily that she lost the United States.

Indeed, a sort of instinct for their rights ran through the veins of the American colonists. They frankly refused to pay the taxes levied by the Parliament in London. They argued that since they were not represented in this assembly, its votes did not apply to them. "A free people," they wrote, "must pay only such taxes as have been levied with its consent. We claim to be a free people."

For eleven years the quarrel wavered, now one way, now another. These two peoples, as we know, are apt to show the same stubbornness in argument as Wellington's infantry at the Battle of Waterloo.

"A free people," they said. In France, this formula was the rage. Through this rose-window of liberty the subterranean labors of the Philosophers saw light. The notion of liberty (so novel in its slightly throaty sound, but obviously in its principles as old as the world, Communes, Jacqueries, etc. . . .) was in the air at the moment; it hopped from branch to branch like a bird, scintillating and winged like a bird and perhaps, like it, not to be seized. Thus the news from America found a complete, a charmed welcome in France. People grew drunk on the word liberty, they ate and they drank of it. Noble and bourgeois brains vied with each other. To the eyes of this

Court of France, wearied somewhat of libertinage, Liberty appeared in the guise of a cool, fresh virgin, almost a savage, something like a Virginie seeking her Paul through the world, with the complexion and hair of some Atala of the rivers, rosy, bearing a heart in each breast. . . .

The maiden was all the rage. She was consecrated a star, by the light of the moon. The dandies smiled fondly on her; young men ogled her. The midinettes dreamed of her in their attics, half-needles, half sighs. The great blue-blooded Academicians made her the subject of prize competitions.

Fashion took her up: there was a hat à la Washington. In the salons, Whist, an English game, was supplanted on the spot by "Boston" (the rebellion had begun in Boston). Beaumarchais sent cargoes of guns to America. Later the world was to know a like excitement at the time of the Boer War.

The women, as always, led the dance. "The ladies of France," wrote Lord Stormont, Ambassador of Great Britain, "blame the parents of Monsieur de Lafayette for trying to check him in his noble enterprise; doubtless they no longer hope to marry off their daughters."

One fine day, tired of it all, the Americans sent their Declaration of Independence shooting to the

heavens: "That all men are created Equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.—That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . . But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

It was Lafayette's illumination. He made up his mind as lightly as one dances, and everything was as easy to his tread as to a man who walks in his sleep. Facility is born of predestination. Just as Knowledge comes to a woman, so this lymphatic and timid youth acquired audacity, energy, will power. America awakened his senses; America, the female, made a man of him.

He ran to his cousins, the Comte de Ségur and the Vicomte de Noailles. He broached his plan to them, won them over to it, electrified them. They decided to embark secretly, as soon as possible.

Lafayette went to the Comte de Broglie and asked his counsel. The count was a far-sighted diplomat. He immediately saw an excellent opportunity to tweak

the Lion's tail in this American business. He secretly encouraged the three young men in their intentions, he assisted them in the thousand and one details that mean a world to children (but for these executive details, how many children of ten to twelve would embark every day for America, for the land of their dreams?). . . .

There were in Paris three American deputies, Silas Deane, Arthur Lee and Dr. Franklin. Lafayette got into touch with them. The interview between this young innocent aristocrat and the ripe stout meanly-dressed, legal-looking Franklin is beautiful as an old print. Poor Richard was then seventy years old. He had grown gray in harness, rancid with experience, wily and solid, he pondered everything thrice. The inventor of the lightning-conductor and of "moral bookkeeping" smelled of the shrewd business-man, but he was tame and timid as a cat. His deep and motionless eye seemed to belong to a pyramid. His idiom not only had weight but hundredweights. He gave three readings to each sentence, each more infinitesimal than the last. Like the chess player who touches twenty-four pawns before he "budges" one.

Money and a ship were necessary. Lafayette offered his purse (quite well lined, an income of 120,000 pounds), he purchased a small ship, which he

Baron de Kalb Introducing Lafayette to Silas Deane
From an old print

christened the *Victory*. A Lafayette gives himself to his cause, heart and possessions.

When everything was ready, the boat waiting at Bordeaux, Lafayette hopped off. Every one was against him, his father-in-law, the minister. The Governor of Guyenne was ordered to arrest him. He had his ship sent to the Spanish port of Pasajes, he galloped off at break-neck speed, he escaped the direst perils with the fine flesh-and-blood luck of youth, he reached the harbor, jumped on his ship, they set sail, and, on April 26th, 1777, he was on the high seas. . . .

This young man of nineteen sailed the seas, with the whole salty expanse at his lips, the winged waters before his eyes. Lafayette attempted and accomplished the finest escape from the world. Therein he proved great, prophetic and eternal. From birth every man should know by heart the great word he uttered: "I will stand my chance." Is that not America's motto? Above and beyond the gesture, it is the symbol that pleases me and fills my breast as a wind bellies a sail. To adolescents in a crisis; to all hysterics, even modern; to the sad and the lonely; to those sick of spirit and ill at heart; to those stricken with the disease of the age; to all who suffer from fear, hunger, or heat; to all those for whom earth

is insufficient, who burn to use it like a springboard of dust, Lafayette offers the great and only remedy: the open. To act, to depart: no fever can resist that urge. Everything is a matter of salt in our poor bones; action is the salt of life. All you who lament, away with you, be off! All you who dream, seize your dream by the throat and give it a fine child. Only the dead dream.

This child of nineteen knew how to be off, how to clear out of it all. That is why I grovel in admiration before him. To conquer thought, he knew how to make alliance with matter, with the body, with the seas, with movement. What did he dream of on the deck of this ship, between heart and sky? He had abandoned his home, his family, Marie-Antoinette, pleasure soft as pomegranates and happiness, fresh as a flower—for what? That evening a sun like a sunflower sank on waves too green, where never an arrow, never a straight line was to be seen in reflection. To turn in a circle seems to be the essential function of the elements, without angle or limit. Alone, this child, escaping from the tangents, inaugurated the infinite, which has a beginning and end, on his own account.

He sets out straight as a plummet, just as the plant makes straight for the sun. Without impedimenta, his heart naked. All his beating breast aspires and

gazes to the heavens like a god. The movement of these waves corresponds to the rhythm of his veins. He surrenders to that liquid immensity, so like the maternal mold, and falls upon it. He seeks out and finds in it the true course of his life. Destiny is our hound, with its great Gothic nose, it chases our pole before us. Let us follow this hound.

"What man has not his little America?" he reflects. Each man must some day discover America, under penalty of death. To discover America means to open one's eyes, to become oneself, to be. America, for man, means action; for woman, love.

America a physical, positive pole. There are two cults in America: the *cult of the Present* and the *cult of the Useful.*

Every young man at the age of seventeen finds himself alone, face to face with life. A duel. There is something Apollo-like, child-like, stupendous, in this way of riding life bareback and setting off for the open. Parents and society do not prepare these ways for him. Nor is it his own business to prepare the way for his children. Each man is his own absolute monarch, king of his life. Before him lies a body of economic, geographical and agricultural phenomena called the Earth. Before him lies "To-day, virgin, quick with life, and beautiful."

The god of TO-DAY.

Every young American at the age of seventeen must discover America.

Across the immensity, a single star: *the principle of usefulness*, so heartily despised in Europe, although people sing in every key that it is the basis of art, of architecture, for instance. And, from the outset, one must recognize reality. Above all, to believe in what is, with all five of one's senses. To believe in the *physical universe*. That is a sine qua non. For there are only two true attitudes towards the world: either to deny it and to imagine another, all of a piece, perfect, ideal, in one's brain (idealism); or else to accept it, such as it is, to govern it and cultivate it so as to pluck its fruits and flowers (realism). *Americanism* is a realism of flesh and bone.

In this vital phenomenon, pure in itself, America takes care not to introduce any parasitical elements, any orchid. The mental orchid *par excellence* is thought. Thought is always exercised at the expense of action. Only mature, complete, settled peoples think. On the other hand, thought is essentially sad, pessimistic. The child that disembowels its doll to *know* it illustrates the very first awakening of thought. Sawdust. It weeps. Thought, source of tears. Thought, symbol of old age (well, golden old age, if you wish!).

The American is a tall fellow, well built, with supple skin and a clear mind. He eats and breathes sensibly, he wears clean linen, he has a bathroom and an automobile, he goes to the movies. He is, in the absolute sense of the word, *earthy*. The Asiatic, on his part, lives on a heap of dung, his nails dirty, his eyes fixed in contemplation on his navel. He is *esoteric*, beyond the earth. The one is sane. the other saintly.

Europe is wavering between the two.

I am an American. I have always written: *the physical first!* This does not mean that the substance is everything (this is stupid materialism), but that it is the principle and the basis of everything. The soul is born if not after the body, at all events at exactly the same moment. No soul, without body. I am American, I love my flesh and my bones and my skin, I make my temple of them. I am American, I appropriate to myself Emerson's formula: "Man is in the saddle and rides on circumstances."

In one hundred and fifty years, this people, the youngest among the peoples (ah! the intoxication of feeling oneself the youngest of peoples!) has done its twelve labors of Hercules.

I like these Americans. I like their billionaires who were once rag-pickers. I like their plain way of talking money. In France we are like ostriches

when fearfully we consider the financial question, we speak of it only in hushed tones, as we might speak of syphilis. But in America, the honest man has a right to cry out: "Hurrah for Money!"

I like Lindbergh.

The crossing was streaky. The English frigates crossed all along the way. The *Victory* escaped them like a zebra. Lafayette, determined to blow up his ship rather than surrender, forbade any light on board. They navigated, groping through a shadow such as favors love. Yes, it was a sort of elopement, without a silken ladder, O Romeo, but with the whole ocean and a heap of moons. . . .

At last, on June 16th, 1777, the *Victory* anchored before Georgetown, in South Carolina. Lafayette, drunk with excitement, hopped into a rowboat. He rowed. Alone, first of them all, he landed. He threw himself on his knees on the American earth, he kissed the sand with rapture. . . . Juliet, Juliet. . . .

He paced forward, with great strides, avid to see, to smell, to swallow. He opened eyes wide as a horse's. He took a handful of earth, let it filter through his fingers, all iridescent. Everything was cool, amazing, virgin. Here in this intense adolescent was the splendid moment when the imagination swamps the real,

penetrates it and gorges it with treasures, the moment when Romeo at last held Juliet fast in his arms. . . .

The world was kindly and airy. Everything here was new: his bed, enclosed with mosquito netting; the black servants. Water seemed more limpid here, children more rosy. In the structure of the ground, in the orientation of the trees, some new principle revealed itself. It was holiday time. A continent painted in the colors of his dreams.

He set out for Philadelphia on horseback, hell-bent. He was still intoxicated. He flattered his horse, that American horse of his, which scented a secret. In everything, from soil to heaven, he sought for signs of liberty, the magic trade-mark *made in Liberty*. The climate he found proud, the rivers superb. He rode along, in joy and space, with wings of ease at his breast and feet, the true breath of the Crusades dwelled in him, the very ardor and rhythm of everything here below, conquest and poetry, those girls of fifteen who go forward towards the essential adventure: to choose a fine male for themselves, pilgrims hungry for hosts, savants drunk on microbes, the illuminated, the ardent, those in fealty, all his peers, his brothers, Jesus, Jeanne D'Arc, Danton, all walking in step for America, and Lafayette, in the very midst of them. . . . He rode forward through

a chaos of forests and torrents, imagining high grassy and bare plateaus, valleys crammed with serpents, warm pampas far as the sight could reach; he was bound to the landscape as he rode through it with all his might.

He galloped over nine hundred miles, his breast washed by the wind, his eyes washed by the sun, his heart washed by the expanse, crossing mountains warm as breasts, islands of birds, antheaps like the Eiffel Tower, flights of crimson flies, deserts of chegoe, fine ravines all shiny with spiders with blue tails, woods agleam with springs, fallen ground of crystal. He pressed ever forward, and ever in his breast that great current of breath and of heart, that double rhythm equivalent to his aspiration and expiration, to take all and give all, in turn male and female toward the world; he pressed forward, universal gluttony in his senses, and all America spurting like a gargoyle in his entrails. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

The Boy

CHAPTER FOUR

The Boy

MY heart was enrolled," writes Lafayette. It was indeed a *coup de coeur*, an infatuation of the heart, perhaps a *coup de sens*, and the senses involved. Popular language, which is a synthesis, calls it a *coup de foudre* or thunderbolt.

As soon as he reached Philadelphia, he had an interview with Mr. Lowell, President of the Committee of Foreign Affairs. He appeared before the Congress.

It was an assembly of grave, simple and upright men. A great air of function, of priesthood, reigned over the hall. Most of them were rather stout, with obvious stomachs; they were frank and devoid of malice, conceived physically and morally on the model of Louis XVI. Many wore wigs, stockings on their legs and small shoes. The ensemble had an air of family, a family counsel, a jury, too. Their legal training impregnated their rigid features, their consciously austere gestures. They are law-ridden to the very nails; intrepid, of course; somewhat like the

Swiss of the cantons. Yesterday they were tradesmen, teachers, planters, and here they stood, judges, almost priests. Their rôle borrowed something from the shop they conducted, from the plow they pushed, from the immense fields; they were a rustic and patriarchal reflection. These squat and chaste revolutionaries owed nothing to Voltaire, their type was Franklin. Under their frock coats, what a perfume of bread their souls exhaled!

Congress hesitated. It had had to deal with so many adventurers, charlatans, sharpers. . . . But this imperious adolescent need only appear to conquer Law.

"I beg two favors," he said; "one that I may serve at my own expense, the other that I serve as a volunteer."

All this ardor, this temper bore fruit. Congress named Lafayette "Major General in the Army of the United States."

The "Major General" rushed to join his command. The American army, under the command of General Washington, was encamped near Philadelphia at the moment. Lafayette presented himself to Washington.

Washington! Here is a fine, fearless and placid man, in the flower of his age (born in Virginia in

The Major-General
From the painting by Alonzo Chappel

1732, he was forty-five years old), perfectly well seated in the center of his soul, direct and pure. His candid glance considered events straight and strong. He was rich with possibility beneath his appearance of a humble planter. Nothing magnificent about him, certainly he was the contrary of a Napoleon; but the stuff, without flower-work, was warm, intense and stark. He was a man like Joffre. That depth of woolen fleece where the hand seeks heavenly warmth. The skin was healthy, the complexion opulent. On his thick wide neck, his solid and full head faced one squarely. In this carriage, in this piece of the self-taught man, I recognize a man with a firm foothold on life. His rectilinear mouth cuts and makes utterance without appeal. The arcades of his cheeks and his massive nose evoke a monument. He exhaled wisdom, safety, authority. To be complete, with a firm seat on body and mind, and of the great family of the statics. Fifty per cent will-power, forty-nine per cent reason, one per cent chance. Scant flame, but fire. His soul was no thunder, it was a lamp. A garden lamp, for he was as familiar as the statued gods. He could smile, drink, make love. Nothing of the hero—how rightly Lafayette once wrote to him: "If you were merely a man like Caesar or the King of Prussia"—, but a man, and, indeed, a male; a finely sensual man at his hour, and he found time for

everything. War is war, flesh flesh. He was a judge of negresses—why not? *

Of a rich temperament, he paraphrased Horace: "Carpe diem, carpe noctem." In the lightning in his eye, in his healthy complexion, appeared that firm virility, that sanity of the senses. To conquer and to make love.

But where he surpassed himself was in simplicity. Whether we call this classical moral grandeur, or rather, as I incline to believe, an extreme cult of the *ego*, here he proved perfect as a geometric figure. With what ardor I follow him as he returns after victory to his farm at Mount Vernon, one evening in December, 1783, on Christmas Eve (he chose Christmas Eve): "At last," he cried, "I am a plain citizen, in the shadow of my vine and my fig-tree." The weak call this modesty, I call it superiority. Always be superior to your rôle, whether above or below. Fear to be a dupe. Choose. Washington wrote: "I am returned to myself." No commentaries. Every great saying bears its immortality within itself.

Immediately these two men hit it off together, the "boy," as Cornwallis immediately dubbed him, and

* Here among others is a trait of his. One of his friends inviting him to spend a few days in the country wrote to tempt him: "To turn your bed down, you will have the same mulatto as last time."

the sovereign. Their interview under a tent, the one all fresh ardor, the other virile power, was almost a marriage. They came out arm in arm. As Washington, smiling, excused himself for having but a sorry army in disorder, Lafayette said: "I am here to learn, not to teach."

Obviously this army lacked brilliance somewhat, if not ardor. It was encamped on a vast grassy plateau near Schuylkill Falls.

Washington attempted to clothe, arm and discipline this mob. The town of Baltimore furnished two thousand guineas' worth of cloth. Women and girls sewed shirts night and day.

With as much success as could be expected, this mass of militia met Cornwallis's tried English infantry. The battle took place on September 11th, at Brandywine.

Lord Cornwallis, conceit and fire, led the attack firmly. The American army gave way, scattered, melted. Disorder spread like a grease-spot. The "boy," attempting to rally the fleeing soldiers on a bridge, was shot through the leg. "Messieurs les Anglais," he writes, "have gratified me with a shot which inflicted a slight wound on my leg." Washington arrived to the rescue with fresh troops. He cried: "Look after him as after my son, for I love

him like a son." He was transported by boat to Bristol, then to Bethlehem, to the Moravian brothers.

On the following day, the English entered Philadelphia. Lafayette wrote to his wife: "If they tell you Philadelphia is captured, the capital of America, the boulevard of liberty, you will answer politely: 'You are idiots. Philadelphia is a sorry town, open on all sides, famous I know not why.' If they continue to ask foolish questions, you will send them about their business."

Soon fate and the authority of Washington compensated America. On October 7th, a strong English army of five thousand men, commanded by General Burgoyne, coming from Canada, was beaten and forced to capitulate at Saratoga.

Lafayette's wound was barely healed when he joined the army again. He longed to win some sprig of laurel for his own part, too. Washington entrusted him with skirmishers for hand-to-hand encounters and dangerous patrols. Lafayette was excellent at such work. In fine, his work in America was to act as mascot. He enchanted the army, urged its morale to flower and brought it luck. But, we must never forget, always under the high authority, the strong hand of his master Washington. One day, with a corps of four hundred men, he threw himself on the

English: Cornwallis, thinking himself at grips with the whole American army, retreated.

This engagement at Gloucester, a skirmish in a word, was the "boy's" first victory, his baptism of glory. Congress at once entrusted him with the command of a division.

"I have chosen a division entirely composed of Virginians," he writes ingenuously. "It is at present weak, almost naked. But I am told I may hope for cloth and men."

A division without cloth or men. . . .

Winter came. They had to encamp in the woods, under rain and frost. Hundreds of militiamen suffered from chilblains, scurvy. The thermometer light-footed went whistling down below freezing-point. They ate acorns, polecats and cuts of leather. They died haphazard.

Before his crystal tent, Lafayette made snow men. The wind smothered his boots. The hair hung from his reddened face.

He formed a ball of snow. Little by little under his dreaming fingers, the snow took on a sense, a significance. In the enchanted landscape, it became a body, limpid, with virgin flanks. Unconscious, his mind lost in the confines of the heart, this "boy" modeled a woman under the winter beeches. A

woman, his wife?. . . . Ah! arrant sentimentalist! . . .

He smoothed that white woman's cheeks, he fondled her breasts under the dead sky. He warmed his hands deep in this block of ice at the fire of remembrance. Little by little a smile swelled his pale lips, his breath was multiplied. A heat devoured his skull, illumined his pupils. With his nail, he engraved on the snow, on a belly of snow, the flaming word: LIBERTY. . . .

* * *

Spring bursts like a bud. One fine morning a blackbird takes fire. Green rings form on the black trees. It seems as though heaven is being washed with all the water of the earth.

The spring of 1778 was a fine American spring. By April, they learned that France was intervening in the conflict; the weight of France tipped the scales. A commercial treaty was signed. America flowered like a hawthorn. On May 2nd, the army built a bonfire. The soldiers, each carrying a firebrand, paraded before Lafayette all starry with fire.

Now Luck's slippery slope loomed up. On May 18th, the English had succeeded in surrounding Lafayette with a corps of two thousand men near Barren Hill. They were already singing te-deums! A great dinner was ordered, the ladies were invited to

Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge

From the painting by Alonzo Chappel

come and see the "boy" taken prisoner. On the appointed day, the English regiments, enclosing the circle, captured . . . . uniforms planted on stakes. They called them "French letters!" (*Capotes Anglaises.*) Lafayette had slipped away like an eel, between the drops. The English general had the colic from it. "And each man went to bed," Lafayette adds.

On June 17th came the victory of Monmouth. Then the retreat of the British towards New York; the arrival of Admiral d'Estaing's French squadron; the naval battle of Rhode Island, unfortunately thwarted by the winds.

Meanwhile matters seem to be dragging somewhat, to Lafayette's taste, at least. One day the "boy" learned that in France there was talk of a landing in England. He was boiling. "If they went there without me," he wrote to Admiral d'Estaing, "I would hang myself." He asked for a leave of absence from Congress and went to Paris (February, 1779).

In Paris, the project of a landing in England did not long hold water. They decided finally to send an expeditionary corps to America. This corps, composed of six thousand men, under the orders of the Comte de Rochambeau, embarked at Brest on May 2nd, 1780. It arrived in Rhode Island on July 17th, occupied it, and fortified Providence.

Meanwhile Lafayette had rejoined the American army. On seeing him again, Washington burst into tears.

The whole campaign of 1780 was spent in preparation, in reconnoitering. Rochambeau did not budge an inch out of Rhode Island.

In May, Lafayette started with two thousand men to defend Virginia. This Virginia campaign was smooth, natural and lyric as a fine day. It was the "boy's" great claim to glory.

Two thousand men was not very much. "I am not even strong enough to get beaten," Lafayette said. "We do not count."

To read all this in serious historians seems like a dream, a tale. You feel that the pen does not follow, the ink clots. You receive the bullet before hearing the explosion. Later, Lafayette will whisper in Napoleon's ear, with his charming childlike humor: "The greatest interests of humanity were decided by the clash of patrolling parties."

The general: twenty years old. The soldiers: light, bare-footed. A bit of cotton-cloth over the belly, and, Forward, march! It was the month of May. The cuckoo sang over the Alleghanies. The army skimmed the soil. Here was nothing of a campaign on land, it was a campaign in the air, from branch to branch.

They began the campaign without equipment, bareheaded. The men sucked violets. Lord Cornwallis, seeing these blithe lads gambolling and this child-general laughing, cried: "The boy cannot escape me!"

The "boy" escaped him with a single leap. All fire, all flame, he seemed to be quicksilver. Always where he should not be, fighting like a humming-bird. He replaced soldiers by miles, strength by sprightliness. He made a fool of old Cornwallis, he scandalized him and dumbfounded him, he dazzled him. The Englishman, following the rules of the art, did not understand a thing. He rubbed his eyes with his Field Marshal's bâton, all he saw was thirty-six thousand candles.

Marches, counter-marches, anti-marches, pseudo-marches: the "boy" was a magician. Little by little he put Cornwallis to sleep, he hypnotized him. It was a fantastic joke. Then, when he had received all his reinforcements, a brigade from Pennsylvania, troops from Washington and Rochambeau, Admiral de Grasse's sailors, in two turns and three measures he fastened down Cornwallis in Yorktown, he encircled him and besieged him.

From then on, it was sport for the "boy" to clear the trenches, to capture the redoubts. On October

17th, 1781, Lord Cornwallis capitulated. The whole British army were prisoners of war.

Lafayette wrote to his wife: "The play is ended. The British are in the soup!"

CHAPTER FIVE

The Backwash of Glory

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The Backwash of Glory

THE morrow. . . .

To-morrow is a terrible cape in the sea of time. The aftermath of pleasure and of triumph are sources of relaxation, of discoloration, of disenchantment. *Post coitum animal triste*. . . .(et post gloriam). There is the demon of noon, the demon of afternoon. In aviation, it is called the air-pocket; in medicine, colic or heartburn. . . .

Or the ills of glory. . . .

With America independent and peace declared (it was signed at Versailles, on September 3rd, 1783), Lafayette found his hands empty, his soul empty. Between the American Revolution and the French, a space—a vague stretch—a No Man's Land.

Like a winter owl, the soul in Lafayette hibernated. Here the soft period flings all its doors wide open, the spirit becomes porous, accessible to enchantments, to all the great temptations. . . .

For a while, he traveled in France and Spain. Then, in 1784, he returned to America again, for his first

triumphal tour. After a visit to Mount Vernon and the battlefields, he attended a conference with the Indians at Fort Schuyler, near Albany. Lafayette entered into negotiations with them, he flattered them, he won them over, half by diplomacy, half by sentiment, and when the moment came, he himself made a voyage among them to sign the treaty in person.

This voyage took place in the autumn of 1784. Its extreme importance lies in the fact that it coincided in Lafayette with a potential crisis that might have proved irreparable. If chance had not turned his soul out to graze, if the prairie and its wonders had not formed an outlet for his energy, who can tell into what ways this perilous victor would have thrown himself?

He arrived in an open carriage. The Indians awaited him behind the river, adorned to the tips of their fingers, ravens' feathers rising over their brows and tomahawks in hand. A fine sunlight illumined their angular ears, their great terra-cotta laughter.

The carriage was placed on a raft. Naked. Indians, with water up to their breasts, pushed the raft, splashing. The thing moved over the river amid a vast animal din. Along the two banks, worried beavers, from place to place, peered out with anxious eye.

For a long time they drove Lafayette through the

camp, a figure of dignity and power, like a Roman of the best period. He must needs visit every hut, puff at every pipe, take each child, one after another, in his arms.

They ate, they drank, they played. . . .

After the feast, as dusk came on, they did the war dance.

On the scaffold of pine wood, the corpse of a warrior lies in relief. He is slightly odorous, as befits mystery, and covered with palms.

In the four corners, four old women as though hewn out of wood, their foreheads against their thighs, huddle down, groaning and lamenting in a desperate rhythm. Now they twist and bend, and now, taut as skins, sweating from God knows what entrails of fire, their sobs, uttered in chorus, support the pyre as with a colonnade of grief. . . .

At a given sign, a strange music preludes, here and there. Brass clashes furiously. A child steps forward from the crowd, smooth, virgin, humming. He bears a torch in his hand, and, dancing forward, he takes his position forward, with his back to the light.

On the official platform, made of the trunks of trees, the Chief smokes a long fish-shaped pipe, the smoke of which rolls itself in spirals against the flanks of the silvery wind.

The moment is at hand. The child, with the ges-

ture of a girl, sets his brand to the logs. One by one, the warriors advance, their cheeks painted, graver than votaries. Their legs are bare, their heads plumed, and, tomahawks in hand, they begin dancing the dance of Death in silence around the pyre.

They dance, and soon, one of them, in a stony voice, attacks the song of the Species. He tells of the Indian Creation, the Empire of Gold, and the barbarous pale-face invasion.

While he is singing and while the fire swells and develops, the dancers, step by step, marry the flame, draw nourishment for their skins from it, commune in it. Little by little, they take off their loin-cloths, their ear-rings, they stand there, virtually naked. Now they are naked, at last, in the young night touched with roses under the violent light of the flaming logs. They abandon themselves to the arms of the rhythm, to the fine incandescent delirium. Their red bellies, as though marked with violets, their sparkling heels, their tongues and their hands, all intermingle and gain strength in swift rhythms. They are grave in their pantomime, but their haunches or some phallic detail from time to time be-garlands the mortuary rite with a strange sexual leit-motif. Sweat, the humors of skins in movement glisten from the depths of their pores, on their flat curves. Their orbicular eyes light up and eclipse themselves like searchlights. Dance,

brilliant geometry, the thought of principles, ovum. The pearls of calves and necklaces of ribs. Patella gleaming like will-o'-wisps, heels that are firecrackers. Dissolving views—shadows on the wall—under the Red Man's sky. A hallooing of shapes.

Already the pyre is crumbling, sparkling with grease. Cinders fly out at a single flight. The embers jump and dance. Are they swallowing the flame in their throats? Or is Heaven taking back its possession? For a last time, a sight of the bloodless, myriad-yeared face of the Chief, immobile on his bench of dream. Then everything falls in the shadows with a great clamor. No sound now save the breath of panting throats, here and there, on the soil, the great heartbeat of a flock of Red Men, bestarred and weary. . . .

* * *

On the morrow, he awakened avid. He stepped out from his bark hut. Outside, the whole prairie. . .

He took three steps forward, dazzled and as though buffeted by all this green space. Far as the eye could see, God's green grass, motionless and flat, thick as wool, cool as one's cheek. That grass, green, vivid, clayey and almost edible, completely veined and as though fed by a green blood, half-water, half-sky.

Seized by this beauty, fascinated,—and perhaps his victorious soul adrift and picking its scent in front of

it at hazard—he began to walk forward, his face turned towards infinity, straight to the sky. He met a naked child who was picking flowers.

"Little Red Child, what is the name of that plain, yonder?"

"The End of the World," answered the little oracle.

The End of the World. He pressed forward, dreaming, delighted. His steps and his desires ranged over this youthful grass, to *the end of the world.* Grass ran down from his eyes into his legs, it made a padding for his heart. Drunk with grass! An incomparable sun, mushroom-like, covered the horizon like a wing. An eagle flew high above purer than an angel. The world was like an apple cut in half. The human, the vegetal and the supernatural, everything entered and ogled everything else, without care for natural divisions.

Lafayette—he was born in Auvergne, he was a son of the trees, of the sap . . . and a son of Rousseau—felt an immense pantheistic hunger in himself. He sat down, he stretched himself out in the mysterious grasses, belly to belly with the grass, mouth to mouth with Mother Earth. . . .

What can he be seeking in that space, in that soil? A sort of return to Nature? Yes, and further still, a return to Matter. The atomical powers in him are gaining ground over the human principle in this hour.

The American campaign: an escapade! At once the warm universal cells capture him again, envelop and bewitch him, reintegrate him in the heart of Substance.

He arose, he started to walk again.

Lafayette pressed forward, and, little by little, his eyes caught in the ambush of reverie, he passed from myth to myth. A sort of torpor seized him to the marrow of his bones. A need of leisure, of immensity, of oblivion. The famous "desert sickness." To go *yonder*, to remain *yonder*, what a fine voyage! To live yonder, and love, and die! All poets, from Goethe to Baudelaire, have felt this to the very bone.

CHAPTER SIX

The Revolution

"Lafayette, eldest son of the French Revolution."
—Ramond, Speech before the Legislative Assembly.

CHAPTER SIX

The Revolution

LAFAYETTE forms an admirable central point for the French Revolution. He is its principle and its tongue, he is ever the poet! At once creator and creature, he models and ordains everything. Without him, to-day, the period between 1789 and 1793 seems incomprehensible.

There are two quite distinct Revolutions; they are, indeed, contradictory, to such a point that Lafayette was *in favor of* one of them and *against* the other: * there is the Royal Revolution (1789) and the Republican Revolution (1792); the Liberal Revolution and the Jacobin Revolution; the Revolution of Ideas and the Revolution of the Pike. In a word, the Revolution of Lafayette and the Revolution of Robespierre.

Lafayette's Revolution begins virtually on April 26th, 1777, the day that he set sail for America.

* One day Lafayette remarked to Napoleon: " . . . the national uprising of 1789, I claim a part in; but, after that period, I would have none of it."

The splendor of his departure, his military successes, the consecration France accorded to them by allying herself officially with the United States—all these phenomena determined a lively liberal movement in Europe, and especially in Paris. Men's brains, already fired by the philosophers to a white heat, yet still empty, found a rich food here entirely to their liking. After the Peace of Versailles, Lafayette was received triumphantly in Paris. At Court, "all the women embraced him." The most beautiful woman in France, Madame de Simiane, grew pale as he passed. In town, he inspired enthusiastic gatherings, mobs of applause. The fishmongers—the fishwives played a mighty rôle during the Revolution—brought him branches of laurel. At the play, fashionable dramatists, such as Rochon de Chabannes in his *French Love*, interpolated a couplet in their plays in honor of the hero:

Behold this courtier, young as you, renounces
Hymen's new joy, Versailles, its silks and flounces,
The velvets and the pleasures of the Town.
The passion of glory, the beacon of renown
Urge him to seek another hemisphere. . . .

Marie-Antoinette alone, recalling Trianon, sulked. But these victories, these social successes, soon became intolerable to her. This hero without sensuality hor-

rified her even more than before. But all the finest Society was ravished, conquered. The governmental classes looked at him through tears of admiration. The Dukes' Party was liberal, to the very limit. Snobbery, as always, mingled in it. People swore by nothing now save liberty.

This Dukes' Party, furthermore, is the party that is always cast in the most egregious parts. They may, moreover, be called *dukes and dupes* (*poires duchesses!*) They are always to the fore when it comes to committing suicide. (And this idea, moreover, agrees excellently, for example, with the system of the "*politique du pire*" or policy of the worst choice. Another mot: *peers and pires.*) Do you know, for instance, who, about 1787, in the Assembly of Nobles, took the first revolutionary steps? —The Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Duc de Luynes. Do you know who was the first man to demand, against even Lafayette, the establishment of the Republic?—The Duc de La Rochefoucauld! (June 24, 1791.) Do you know who, during the days of July, 1789, applauded from the eminence of the terrace of the Tuileries, as the people ran towards Versailles?—The Dukes, always the dukes. (Lafayette said "the elegant people who stood on the edge of the terrace of the Tuileries.") To-day they are Communists. They are mortally

afraid to appear reactionary. The left seems vulgar to them, fit for the rabble; but the extreme left—ah, that's something else again! The extreme left is chic. Another: *grandees and dandies.* (As for dukes and snobs, that is obvious!)

The case of the Comte de Montboissier is well-known. They were voting in his office. He was asleep. They awakened him. Stupefied, he asked: "What have you decided?" A neighbor answered: "We have decided *aye.*" He voted *aye.* (He had just voted for the Revolution.)

It was one of Louis XVI's capital errors to have leaned on the aristocracy, whose ranks were *rank* with liberalism (whereas, on the contrary, the people's liberalism is healthy, based upon common sense). It was the nobility made the Revolution necessary. I wager that Louis XVI and the Third Estate would have hit it off.

From 1780 to 1789, the Revolution is in the air.

Words move, and none more than the word revolution. Towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, it had a full legal, paradisial, almost idyllic sense. It is virgin. The beaux esprits, the women lick their chops over it. The "Maupeou Revolution" had already occurred; People spoke of Revolution as easily as touch and go. The very elements took a part in it. Towards the end of September, 1786, an unheard-

of catastrophe occurred in the south of France: the trees burst. One fine morning, with no preliminary tattoo or bugle-call, a great freezing draught split the region—horizontally, skimming the earth, like a blade. It literally cut short the trees' breath, it cut their sap. The cold, as suddenly as this, created in the vegetable kingdom round about it an instantaneous frost, which caused a sudden expansion of volume, which, in turn, brought about a breaking and bursting. The cells, the marrow, the vasculary canals, gorged with autumnal liquids, suddenly exploded. Everywhere vegetation was disorganized and crumbled like a house of cards. Trees opened up before one's eyes, with a glacial tumult, pines split like grenades, the stumps fell. Now there was nothing here and there but broken and yawning stumps, leaves flying into fragments, fields of pulp, stubs and bleedings; a sort of fireworks of tissues and bark; the flesh of things laid bare. This beneath a sky that had remained limpid and, in its heights, still warm. The sight partook of magic and terror. In the realm of the imagination. By its rarity, its weirdness, its suddenness, its sadistic air in spite of everything, and the tragic disaster it spread over the stupefied fields and what an agricultural disaster it turned out to be, the phenomenon, in the eyes of the people, took on the air of a portent, an annunciation. It was a revolution.

One day, at the house of the Duc d'Harcourt, as the courtiers were speculating whether the Dauphin need learn Ancient History, Lafayette murmured; "I think he would do better to begin History at the year 1787."

For the year 1787 saw the meetings of the Assembly of Nobles (the little finger in the spokes). Everything moves link by link in life, (and everything is in balance—these are the two great laws). The Conventions sprang directly from the Nobles.

Indeed, these Nobles felt themselves and actually were merely illusory, impotent. There is nothing more tragic than the man caught by logic (like a bird in a snare). There was a deal of talk, hopes were formulated, and then what? No, this wasn't the thing at all. Something else was needed.

One fine day, this need suddenly found expression. On the lips of Lafayette, naturally. In the course of a speech, he cried: "We do beg His Majesty to gather around his person the sum of all efforts and forever to consolidate the happy result by calling together a *National Assembly*."

"What's that? What? A National Assembly?" The Comte d'Artois leapt in his seat.

And Lafayette answered:

"Yes, my Lord, *and better still than that*."

MARIE, PAUL, JOSEPH, ROCH[illegible],
GILBERT DE MOTTIER DE LA FAYETTE
Député de la Auvergne à l'Assemblée Nationale
en 1789 & Commandant General de la Garde
Nationale Parisienne le 15 juillet

Commander of the National Guard
From a French print

And on May 26th, 1788, he wrote to Washington: "They must absolutely have a National Assembly or nothing."

It was the States-General.

They met on May 4th, 1789. April, May, these are months of sap. Everything burgeoning, everything *sans-culottes*. Castles in Spain, marvels of Peru, revolutions. . . .

Lafayette was deputy of the nobility of the district of Auvergne. At Versailles he paraded in a coat of gold cloth, breeches of white satin, a silk coat of royal blue, a lace cravat, a large plumed hat on his head, his rapier clanking against his heels, a tallow candle in his hand. Before the nobles walked the deputies of the Third Estate, all clad in black cloth. Someone cried out: "Gawd! look at those guys!"

At once there arose points of protocol, bickerings of etiquette swelled the chorus. The question of voting individually or by order lasted forever. The Third Estate, increased by a great part of the clergy and by a few noblemen, deliberated in the Tennis Court. The King sent them orders, through the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé, to separate immediately.

"Go tell your master," cried Mirabeau, "that we are gathered here by will of the people, and that only at the point of the bayonet will we be driven out."

The King, at a loss, found no answer:

"So they won't leave the hall, eh? Very well, let them stay there!"

This man Mirabeau was an incomparable scoundrel. Splendidly corrupt he was, like a marble rotten with verdigris. Powerful, with the appearance of a pachyderm, the facial expression of a bull-dog, his was a massive face. An organ. An elementary, embastarded soul, copper-colored with vice, inhabited and worked upon this physical block. The sensuality of the early ages, slimy desire gleams on this thick-lipped face, pitted with small-pox. Animal needs, the taste of the mire, venal inclinations, a breath of caves, and, above it all, the obscure crackling of corruption. He resembles Danton but he is a richer model, there is more of the "marquis" in him. More Asiatic, indeed, more mysterious, with a foundation of mold. An intelligence at once agile and positive, well coördinated, ample with sly notes, always the aristocrat, evoking in its thick and squat envelope, the Nymph with a Satyr's hands. *Noli me tangere*. . . . They stayed there. They busied themselves with formulating the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man. Its text was drawn up by Lafayette. From the rostrum, he called it a "catechism of human liberty." This declaration moreover exhaled and exuded Lafayettism. It was the true profession of faith of our hero.

In the meantime, while the National Assembly chattered, slobbered, babbled—verbal incontinence is the scourge of assemblies—some one (the people) was acting. On July 14th (Lafayette, on paper, was the Vice-President of the National Assembly), the people captured the Bastille.

"What?" says Louis XVI. "Then it is a rebellion?"

"No, Sire," answered the Duc de Liancourt. "It is a revolution."

As soon as the fever of July 14th, was over, Paris felt the necessity of creating itself a popular public force. Half-spontaneously, half from the matrix of circumstances, the National Guard was born. This Guard needed a leader. One name rose to all lips: Lafayette. On July 15th, Lafayette was named by acclamation the Commander of the National Guard. Now I am afraid our hero saw in this simply a child's ornament—a pretty uniform when one is playing soldiers. As a matter of fact, he was actually being entrusted with the army, in a virtually new state, the public force, the police. . . . And, no matter where, whoever rules the police is hated. . . .

August, September passed by, while a certain order was being applied to this chaos. Bit by bit, royalty grew conscious of the times. The people were cal-

culating. Lafayette was all wrapped up in his National Guard.

But side by side with the people was the populace. And ever since July 14th, the people had been the prey of an epidemic of insurrectionitis (the disease of revolt). Moreover it must be confessed that this fine shaking of plum-trees on July 14th, had given very few plums—or rather nothing. The people, who judges by the fruit, still felt itself empty-handed. It felt that, in reality, nothing had been accomplished.

At every corner, on all occasions and for nothing, quarrels broke out—now exploding, now capering. On the morning of October 5th, from one end of the capital to the other,—great events have something spontaneous which stabs reason in the heart—an immense clamor arose: "Bread! Bread!" Pale men, drunken women, crazy children ran through the streets. The tocsin rang. People looked at each other, they scented things. Soon in every corner of Paris the same cry rose from the depths of their souls: "To Versailles!" The wind blew towards Versailles. Events, just as the plant goes to the sun, tended towards Versailles.

An uprising is a gathering of obscure thoughts and their placing in bundles, in battery. The bundle of the crowd, on October 5th, turned its point towards

Versailles as powder aims at the highest tree. To tackle a thing, man takes its highest point.

All day, bands of women, of children, of butchers, trotted down the road to Versailles. Little by little, all this made quite a large crowd. Lafayette grew worried. Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, he decided to start for Versailles with several of his battalions.

These battalions of the National Guard, in principle entrusted with the preservation of public order, in reality could not but be heart to heart with the crowd. In this, they were very much on the pattern of Lafayette. For the hero's disease was simply this: his heart was *pro*, his mind *con*. This conflict properly constitutes the drama of Lafayette.

The night passed without trouble. Lafayette took all the necessary steps, he housed the troops, stationed patrols. He visited the guard-rooms. The people, moreover, were good. Lafayette, the great child, negligently imagined he was but a toy. . . . Towards daybreak, worn out, he fell asleep on a bench, in a pall.

Suddenly he was awakened. He started up. They told him the crowd had just invaded the Château. It was six in the morning.

He trotted into the courtyard, half-awake, dazed, dazzled by the dawn. The grille had been torn down.

A mob of the people, howling, submerged the Palace Guards, rushed forward towards the Château. . . . Soon the whole courtyard was filled with them. A savage and hilarious multitude, with muskets, pikes, gesticulated and bawled. Girls without hats beat on drums, their teeth in the air. Others, their dresses trussed above their knees, their legs kicking, dragged an old cannon at the end of a rope, from God knows where. Ragged children, inspired old men, brandished incommensurable pikes from the ends of their arms. Fish-wives from the Halles sketched obscene gestures towards the windows. Some of them carried their children in their arms, wearing the caps of Liberty. Voices of every caliber sang an infernal Carmagnole. Mute and pallid incendiaries, in sandals, lighted fires near the doors. Sans-culotte hodmen danced with bloodless little girls. The more obese defecated in front of the statues of the kings. Others spat on the marbles.

In a corner, two Palace Guards had just been massacred. Women's hands—"the flesh of woman, ideal clay"—cut their heads off with a knife, they placed them on the ends of pikes, they walked them through the courtyard, dripping with blood, sadistic.

They swamped Lafayette, who, moreover, was practically single-handed. The mob broke down the doors with musket-blows. Young men clambered over each

others' shoulders to get through the windows. At last a group of butchers forced through a panel and crept through the apartments one by one. And in halls and stairways, they hunted the Palace Guards; it was a man-hunt. They tracked them down, they shot them down point blank. Pikes smelled of blood in the cool morning.

Meanwhile the battalions of the National Guard were coming up, a company of Volunteers under Captain Gondran. They freed the buildings of the Château before the rioting had reached as far as the King's apartments. But the crowd filled the court, panting and voracious. How, by what flower, to appease this monster?

Then it was that Lafayette caught his genius on the fly. This hour needed its heroic tenor. Lafayette was not only a tenor, but a great tenor. He played the heart as a virtuoso plays the violin. This great sentimentalist, for once, found his right place: he improvised a fine sentimental scene.

He was in the royal apartments. He moved forward, alone, on the balcony, opposite the crowd. He addressed them:

"What do you want, children?"

Voices. . . a thousand voices. . . .

"The Queen."

He made a sign, he turned about, he went to fetch

Marie-Antoinette, he led her by the hand right out to the balcony. The crowd hissed, howled. Fists and pikes!

Then Lafayette had an extraordinary inspiration. He bent the knee before the Queen and slowly, religiously, he kissed her hand.

The mob, dazzled, burst into tears. The strings of the heart resounded to the breaking-point. They applauded. They smiled. They cried: *Vive la Reine!*

It was over. The King promised to come to Paris. They all departed together, King and people, arm in arm. . . .

* * *

Little by little, the Constitution was finished. The King ratified it. The Revolution seemed ended. They wished to finish the whole business by a great holiday.

It took place on July 14th, 1790, the anniversary of the capture of the Bastille. Three hundred thousand people filled the Champ de Mars. There were delegates there from every province, from every trade guild, from every order, the whole of France. A spring-like, wingèd emotion fed every heart. For the first time in the history of France, a unanimous sentiment, new and sensitive as a rose, made every heart in France beat at the same hour and with the same pulse.

Lafayette's Inspiration
From an old print

Lafayette capered. This was his holiday, here was the Revolution he had dreamed and willed, no revolution of blood, but one of love—here it was, in flesh and blood. He was all light on his fine white Sunday horse. He was as jubilant as a child having at a bottle of jam. For a picture ever allured him, and what a picture the Federation was! It was a pause of roses between the days of October and the days of September. Can these be the same men who to-day fervently embrace humankind and to-morrow assassinate priests and women on the stark steps? Kindness streams out of their eyes, like a dew under the rays of the sun. They are sincere with the worst of sincerities, the sincerity that blinds one. This Champ de Mars is a Paradise, somewhat impressionable, perhaps, but void of malice. They sing and dance. After liberty, after equality, now they are hymning fraternity. Dancing around arm in arm they swear indissoluble union, eternal friendship. Words are too small to speak their tenderness. They express their feelings in sighs.

Yonder, under the torchlight and in the wind, surrounded by two hundred priests with tricolor belts, against a background of flags, Monseigneur Talleyrand, Bishop of Autun, is officiating at the altar of the motherland. . . .

* * *

This was the apotheosis. Up to this point Lafayette had prepared, conducted and ruled the Revolution. He it was who brought it about, this Revolution, *his* Revolution, the Lafayettist Revolution. This man is the type-Revolutionary. Later he himself will glory in being "the man of the four revolutions." In March, 1792, Rochambeau, without the least wit, said to the King: "The point is to raise a revolution in Belgium, and Your Majesty is aware that *Monsieur de Lafayette understands that sort of thing better than anyone else.*" Ever since 1783 Lafayette had had in his room a great frame with two panels; on the right panel was the American Declaration of Independence; the left panel was empty—it awaited the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. One day Louis XVI was reviewing his troops; he stopped in front of an officer, and, stupefied, contemplated the emblem he wore on his shoulder-belt. It was a tree of liberty planted on a broken sceptre and crown. The officer was Lafayette. In 1788, he wrote to Washington: "As for me, I hope ardently for a bill of rights and a constitution." It was rightly that some one called him, one day, from the heights of the forum, "the eldest son of the French Revolution."

From 1789 to 1791, during the entire Lafayettist period, Lafayette was all powerful, to such a point,

indeed, that he was several times called the "King of Paris" and the "Master of the Palace." (Mirabeau.) One day at Versailles, a courtier, seeing him pass, cried out: "There goes Cromwell!"

Yes, this Revolution, it was he who modeled it and marked its edges with his thought and his heart. Where were they, what were they doing, these fine but rather tardy revolutionaries called Marat, Danton, Robespierre? One of them was busy filing documents, his glass to his eye, in Arras. The other was chatting, drinking and wenching in a dive in the Place du Palais. Still another was feeling the pulse of the Comte d'Artois, bilious and shriveled up, his nose in his syringes. They were still notaries, men of law, lawyerlings. Later they would be executives, soldiers. Lafayette was the chief.

Who was it demanded the summoning of the States-General? Lafayette.

Who was it proclaimed that "insurrection is the loftiest of duties?" Who was it drew up the Declaration of the Rights of Man? Who had the Army (the National Guard) and, consequently, the true power? Who formulated this principle: "military power must be subservient to the civilian power?" Who demanded that "the Church and the Government be absolutely separated?" Indeed, are these not

the four or five main points of any true revolution?

Lafayette, always Lafayette. . . .

* * *

In the life of man there is a pinnacle, a supreme point from which every slope proceeds. It is the knot of destiny. From July 14th, 1790, onward, Lafayette sinks and pales like a star at early morning, in the early morning of the guillotine. Popularity always casts its cloud. The Capitol always casts its shadow.

The poet, the teller of fables, in all ages, have noted this phenomenon of the fall, beginning with the fall of Adam. There is no longer a rise, but a descent towards death. And then in love, in politics, in everything, the moment of triumph coincides with the moment of decline. The two extremes touch not wings but centers; they touch and they mate. And then to conquer is to place oneself inevitably on the defensive. To have means to keep. The man who caresses a sleeping serpent, stroking him with his left hand, and offering him bread dipped in red wine, finds that little by little the serpent gains strength, he hisses and grows fierce, he abandons himself to his natural function which is to bite. The apprentice sorcerer opens the tap to the powers, then he loses his head, he blunders, the powers devour him. The white horse

of the National Guardsman, the debonair and kindly horse one day stampedes. . . .

After July 14th, 1790, Lafayette becomes the moderator, as Brissot says. At once, Rivarol on the right, Marat on the left, leap at his throat. Marat calls him "General Halfway."

The inconvenience of the center is to be between two fires. And Fafayette was essentially in the Center. He wished to say to the Revolution: "Thou shalt go no further!" In 1788 he wrote: "I shall be moderate."

He was moderate, and, according to the rules, he was devoured.

Up to this point Lafayette stood with the people against the King; now he was about to defend the King against the people. It must be confessed that here is a disconcerting change of front. The crowd was scarcely of a mentality to understand why Lafayette gave it cakes when it attacked the Bastille and whipped it when it attacked Vincennes. Indeed, he repressed the uprisings with the same ardor as he had once used to excite them. In the affair of the Champ de Mars, in point of fact, he ordered the troops to shoot at the people. Casualties: twelve dead. Fréron thundered: "No, no, nothing will ever again wash off the indelible stain of the blood of your brothers; it is a slow poison that will devour you."

On June 20th, 1791, the King took to flight. He was arrested at Varennes, he returned to Paris in a sepulchral silence. Lafayette had sworn *on his head* to be responsible for the King. Danton apostrophized him: "Either you have betrayed your country or you are a fool." I am afraid the second alternative is true.

Finally the Constituent Assembly, its work finished, disbanded on September 30th, 1791. Lafayette, weary and smelling the sulphur, resigned his commission as Commandant of the National Guard. It was, all in all, a rather fine end. The city of Paris offered him a sword forged from the "locks of the Bastille." He left Paris to go to Auvergne. Ah!

It might have meant his salvation. France still loved him. All along the road he received civic crowns enough to "fill his carriage." He reached Chavaniac in the middle of autumn (he was born at Chavaniac on an autumn day). . . .

Why did he not stay there?

* * *

He scarcely stayed at all. On April 20th, 1792, the Legislative Assembly declared war upon Austria. Lafayette was called to the command of a French Army.

He departed. He established his headquarters at Metz. But with the memory of Washington helping him, as well as some flow of presumption, he kept one eye on the enemy, one eye on Paris. The word always found him rebellious but fundamentally he could see himself only in the rôle of a Monk or a Cromwell. As a general, he watched politics. At all provocations, he went to Paris, he presented himself at the bar of the Assembly, he drew up Messages to the Nation. On June 16th, he uttered the Manifesto against the Jacobins. Danton and Robespierre attacked him violently. "Strike Lafayette," cried Robespierre, "and the nation is saved!" And André Chénier invoked in two lugubrious lines:

"The day that will bring Jourdan to the head of
our Army
And Lafayette to the scaffold."

The scaffold! The word is spoken! Each day the situation grows worse. Soon comes June 20th, and its scenes of the Carmagnole. Then the Brunswick manifesto. At last comes August 10th, the great republican day, the pike plunged into the side of monarchy, the King in the prison of the Temple. On August 19th, Lafayette is summoned with impeachment. Will he come to Paris to justify himself?

Old Marshal Lückner, in his heavy German accent, tells him: "Don't go: the *sans-culottes* will cut your head off!" On the 20th, he takes the road of exile. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Manly Sex

"That day the Emperor was walking, stick in hand."
—Mémoires of Sergeant Bourgogne.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Manly Sex

ON August 20th, 1792, Lafayette left France at dusk, in the despondent hour when the heart is drugged and heavy with all the day's dust and spent lees. A little band of officers rode with him, fifteen in all.

"And pray, can a man stow away his country in the heel of his boot?" cried Danton. No. No, Danton; but he can stow away there its life, its maternal vitality.

They were riding, fifteen haphazard horsemen, conscripts of chance, dead ahead, aimlessly . . . Bitter, bitter the bread of exile! . . . Lafayette recalled his famous colloquy with Prussia's King. One day, talking to Frederick of America and liberty, he exclaimed in the heat of enthusiasm: "Never will America know nobles or kings!"

"My dear sir," said the old monarch, "I once knew a young man who visited many lands where liberty and equality reigned. On his return, he resolved to

establish them in his own. Do you know what happened?"

"No, sire."

"My dear sir," said the king, smiling, "he was hanged."

That evening, Lafayette was haunted a-horseback by a spectre, Potsdam's wrinkled pythoness, dangling on the shrill starlight, croaking and scorpionesque. . . .

In reverie he heard Lückner's Teutonic growl: "The bloody *sans-culottes* will have your heads, dot's vot."

They were riding, fifteen French liberals, mounted, to exile, into the unknown . . . Shadowy trees, ahead, behind, advancing, receding, ambling by. Silhouettes of Danton, of Robespierre?

Belgium . . . tillage, copses, meadows. The shroud-like night, dense, voluminous. A twig underfoot cracks, a skunk's cry peoples space. Suddenly, the total moon, globular . . . In the anatomy of Night all that is rigid, how Luna animates it, lends it illusory relief! A child, another and another, opening the water-cocks, the cool sluice-gates. Ah, how this silent gallop through the night alive with artifices and aureoles hallucinates the soul, beckons it to the Never Never Land!

Dreams, visions, pure alibis of the soul sore-tried! . . . Now to the weary eyes and sad of Lafayette a

woman comes. . . . His wife, Adrienne de Lafayette. . . . He had left her at Chavaniac, with their three children. Adrienne! The moon is windblown, Or what makes her giddy? . . . Adrienne de Lafayette . . . *Their marriage day. . . . He was seventeen, she fourteen. April. On every bough a bud and a nightingale. Little Adrienne d'Ayen, April-pale, white as apple-blossoms. He a captain of Musketeers, not much of a Captain, not much of a Musketeer, but with a man's heart, on a woman's breast, and brave days ahead . . . The ceremony in a country church; blushing rites. The aisles and vaults sleek with notaries. And alone, in a clearing, like two bunnies, the bridal couple—one and thirty years incorporat—clasping eyes, tender, docile, under an old pane full of saints sun-bathing . . .*

Downhill runs the sandy road. Belgium grows cool. The horses slip in their swollen shadows. Lafayette lays hand to heart, fingering a sheaf of letters. Love letters? . . .

Lafayette never knew love: not, at all events, Franco-Judaic love, hairy, chesty love. I see him as a sentimental lover, a pure one, a great one: that and nothing else. He has no senses. That sharp and sloping brow never knits, never tightens. Those large level eyes are flat. He has no nose, and the rune runs: *No nose, no sex!* (sex, the stronger sex!) All that is

carnal, loinish, incarnadine, wheezing and a bit barbarous in your true male, Lafayette lacks. The spread of chest, the furnace of the veins, the vast odor of Nature: he has none of it. His lips are thin; and no nose. No nose, no sex. The man's features, his nose on his mouth, form a kind of cross. The sense of him is there, nowhere else. He has a defunct, or rather an extinguished look, a lunar look. He is a bit of a shadow, a silhouette. A theorem too. All flesh absent, all substance abolished. A man in two dimensions: he lacks the beautiful third. No hair, in Samson's sense. He drinks water, and water breeds hydrogen. Women play no part in his life, a blank, zero. I could swear he never betrayed his wife. For all the good his senses did him, he was virgin to his death. In America, land of lovely girls with shining skin, new nerves, mark what he says: "They are very pretty, very simple, and of a charming cleanliness." Are those the words of a man who knows his subject; is that a male conclusion? Mischievous Marie-Antoinette: see how he sends her packing. And poor Madame de Simiane, the most beautiful woman at Court, a lady who left in her wake "a sort of rapture," poor Madame de Simiane, who lost her heart to him like a green girl, who pined so long and burned for him so hard in secret, who flew to Germany, fondly, to see him, so soon as he left the dungeons of Olmütz:

never an itch, an impulse, nothing! Dammit, the man has no entrails; he is all heart! Sterile? I think not. But I feel complete deviation of the senses: a kind of terrible deflection of his marrow, all sensual energy turned to ideology. The main-stream of sense here finds outlet in politics. He said himself his zeal for liberty was like the "compulsion of love." His heart he gave his wife; but his sex to liberty. Liberty for mistress. That makes his case a tantalizing one, mysterious and attractive. He offers a virgin field of conjecture to our imagination. For his fellows he has a two-fold appeal: one for the collector of curios, one for the lover of logic. . . .

Sentimentality? Ah! Lafayette takes the palm. He drools with tenderness, belts with sympathy (Simiane could tell you, but poor soul, she looks for more!) On this tragical night, which divides his destiny, our great sentimentalist is riding, hand on heart, with but one thought—to re-read his wife's letters. A halt. Here, on this Belgian road bathed in cold moonlight, here ensues a scene shall warm its dust for long. The horses puff, pale with stars, connubial with clouds. A whinny links them, lunar, one by one. Tethered by an air, they blend. They are one with beautiful blue shadows. Neighing? Nay, laughing, or I lie.

Lafayette, in a ditch, cuddled in the plunging shelter of a tree, laughs. He feels for letters, mauve with night and fingering. He lights a square-paned lantern, tiling all the dark. Here's humanity to humanize the skies. Magic now in every ligament. Lafayette laughs, I tell you, splutters like his lantern's light full of alternate enlightenments and shares. He begins to read:

". . . *Lafayettism! Ah! my dear, for that sect I shall give my life: I foresee it well.*"

Meanwhile his companions are chafing, tapping the loveless soil with heel and spur. Time to mount. Lafayette sets his lips to the old silvered letter, swings to the saddle, sighs . . .

And the cavalcade moves on, under a magnified moon, that swells more and more in night and malice in a heaven more and more barren. She too in her own way is in high fettle, merry now, peek-a-boo-virgining, like a lass, loosening a full breast, anon almost bawdy and as bearded as a satrap.

On, on. And that billowing a-horseback rocks the hungry heart. It brings oblivion, a sweet sense of non-existence. Time trot-trots. . . . Time too is mounted . . . Time as well rides, he knows not where.

From those nocturnal realms all life hereafter emanates. You suck it from the nipples of magical

vast night. To-morrow? pull, pull: all its secrets come to thumb. There lies your way, light on the left, black on the right, and there, straight ahead, the long file of all to come, shine and shade mingled. Like the dream of evening, miraculous to willing men.

His wife: he sees her throttled, dimly far away, by prankish roses. Chavaniac it is, he knows the mint that minds the drawbridge, all his memories flock like sheep, the world spins in his head, all ever black, worse than black: ghastly gray. The woman vanishes amid bobbing staves, the day pops from its box like a yellow chick, on the road to Brioude a tiny girl swings a milk-can in a gory hand, by the road-side, in the fields, farmer-boys in Phrygian bonnets stack mown heads, the peasants of Chavaniac bring the children of their ex-lord jam, the wind turns the page. Click: the sans-culottes thrust the woman in a gaol, and you hear a great guffaw of arms.

Lafayette rubs his eyes. The horses, in open country, are pawing fields; haystacks stud a slope. Overhead, still, still, the moon, too calm, too calm. Never trust silence, child; man, never trust silence. The horses slip downhill. Now they wind along a brook gleaming, sleek. A screech-owl, startled, flies, throttles, with a whirr of wings. You hear a tinkle in the high chariots of the skies.

A prison . . . on the platform soldiers, hipshot, oblique. Inside . . . an immense underground hall, massive, sibylline. Armorial mattresses, straw-beds, benches, tables. In that hall, the chosen fair of France, flesh and silk, a mite less powder maybe, a few patches less, but still the majesty of gallantry. But yesterday laughing, singing, drinking; but yesterday loving, tender, mouths moist with kisses. They still reek of love. For what fête are they here, to what Sabbath are they bidden?

Lafayette rubs his eyes. Ahead of him the paddling fields and moon-laid road. A stream, hark, he hears its clucking slumbers. On, on, the fifteen horsemen, somber with sleep and lassitude, trailing a long wake of trodden leagues.

. . . While in the vision, two guards summon the prettiest prisoner. Her cantharis eyes illumine the vault. They seize her roughly and, with nudging pikes, and thrusts of boot, heave her on a tumbril; the tumbril starts, and with it rolls the world. . . . In the prison, life goes on. Fair ladies, dapper sirs, arm in arm, stroll and flutter. Ladies, gentlemen: no, males and females now. For on the brink of death, as on a river-bank, we strip. Under taffeta gowns and smart breeches hearts beat and blood races. Now the loins are lion, now the flesh claims payment full before it fades, the lion's share. Now no curb

holds. Ah, how the guillotine excites the blood! . . . In this underground gaol, sunk in predatory chiaroscuro, dimly pierced by three beams of meager day, tattered day, sans-culottes day, the late court of France, the late Regency, the two late Trianons have settled with Lares and Penates. All this splendor bobs and bubbles, with what tact it may, but plainly derelict. Curtsies, hand-kissings, hats sweep the ground in semi-circles, but under it all you feel hungry mouths, itching fingers. Everything gleams strangely in this chequered dusk, buckled slippers, rings, eyes. In a corner, a mound of dross palpitates. Suddenly you hear—and all pale, why?—a great, soul-wracking sigh. . . .

Lafayette rubs his eyes . . . Come, come, all is quiet enough here, in all conscience, on this Belgian earth. These spaces are dead with peace. The moon is fuller than very Nature.

. . . But there, in that hellish prison, minute by minute, the door swings, soldiers enter: a victim vanishes . . . Tumbril . . . March! The same regularity, the same cadence as in dreams. With each gap the living grow bolder. Closer the grouping, quicker the finding. A slobber of kisses constellates the scene. Some one cries: "There aren't enough. They won't go round." At once a frenzy of beasts-of-two-backs, like bubbles on water. All are mad with hunger.

Lips go to it, eyes grow taut and founder. It is like some tragic Ball of the Quat-z-Arts. Along the walls, standing conjunctions. Others lie flat, like drinkers at a well. Everywhere that soaring desire, that ravenous lust of life. To be, to live, to exist. And always that door opening, always that empty tumbril . . . one less . . . And back, back again, to the surges of sense. Death must be challenged. It is no mere matter of pleasure now, but a combat, a mortal combat between life and death. A vigorous lad snatches a ripe matron: spliced they roll in a corner in spider-webs, scuffle a moment, then gutter out, drained. An old man in a white wig swoons on an alabaster breast. Beds of love: fields of battle. A child shrieks: "I don't want to die yet!" The door. Tumbril . . . Fireworks of flesh. A jog, a rush of the nerves, and the great little sacred squeal. A young girl is standing alone, crying. Tumbril. And again, fitfully, implacably, this vast concupiscence, like a wind. All comes to the top, in this great earthquake of the flesh. And outside, voices are singing the Ça ira: *"Off we go, off we go; All that is ups now, shall lie low."*

Do you know the Symphony of the Sounds of Love?
For bed, the voice of avowal, like a sea spreads.
Kisses like nenuphars slowly blossom there.
About the lake, do re, do re, a border of sighs.

Shivers of lips, swayings of wavering weeds.

Suddenly a long peal of laughter, then the high note of the nerve. The glutted thrill of the great fish-nets full of their haul. The belling of the Infinite. . . .

Door . . . tumbril . . . Soon only two living creatures are left in the prison: a young man and a young woman. Lafayette rubs his eyes, looks closer. *. . . What! Marie-Antoniette! Marie-Antoinette here?* He rubs his eyes. The Belgian moon moistens the nocturnal landscape. But there, there in that prison . . . *A young man and a young woman . . . Alone in that reeking hall. The boy throws himself on, against, into the woman. In his arteries runs the great spasm of rape. She struggles, or half-struggles, and the rascal rummages, deeper, deeper, soon from the silk a breast peeps, his tickling works wonders, the man pants, protuberant, she moans, aghast, sways, her hands gaping in space, her tongue in her teeth, moist, throbbing, swooning, with a little foam of saliva on her lips. . . .*

The door opens. Two soldiers tear the woman away and sweep her off, laughing; their sabots clatter. Still half-dead with love, she falls on the tumbril. The driver cracks his whip. They roll through the echoing portico. The heavy wheels on the cobbles jostle your very entrails. She shuts her eyes. It is

Marie-Antoinette. It is she. Daylight laves her throat. She is jostled along, upright in the cart. The cart, an old mossy rattle-box, rolls through Paris. The tocsin is ringing, why? The crowd lines the streets: a hedge of eyes. For the first time in her life Marie-Antoinette observes, observes closely that tricolored crowd, docile and threatening, ancient and new. To-day it shows nothing but upraised fists, a hedge of fists. That same crowd was once gay, gallant; now it is atrocious and virgin. Pickled fish-wives shriek themselves hoarse. Young men breathe, gaping, the juice of day. Dogs slip by, under spread legs, tail in air. Little children, eager and fresh, split with laughter, make with tiny hands the motion of mowing heads. In that crowd there are savage old men, grimacing and mysterious, laborers discolored like worms, calculating artisans, a squawling scum, reddish and black with thick weekly grime. All that scum shouts, howls, gallops, wretched and utterly happy. On a little square some bourgeois are planting a Liberty Tree. A child slips and sprawls on the pavement. An inrush of people, a crab of people smothers a woman with child, her abdomen hugged on all sides. As the cart passes, stones are thrown, stones and cabbage heads. And all so heartily. The more enthusiastic tug the horse by the bridle, with a horrible real delight. As far as the eye can see, the

crowd is singing the Carmagnole . . . Girls, boys, matrons, cockades in their hair, sing at the crossings. Hands are split with applause, tears of ecstasy are gulped. A little savage, that crowd, but natural, therefore human.

Hoist in her rolling cart, Marie-Antoinette looks about her. . . . That crowd looks like so many ants to her. She is far from it, insensible, dry, lost . . . She looks at the signs hanging rusty, the dentists' shops, the great quarters of red beef on the stalls. Yonder, in a square, some small boys are playing and cheating; and the strongest, equable and assured, is slapping the losers right and left. Further on, on a roof, two pigeons are plucking each other's plumes, mute and cruel, all for an innocent female. The illustrating world is full of truth and logic. . . .

It begins to rain. Three large drops like a sounding; then the downpour. A jam of carts stops the procession. The wagon halts. At that, a headlong rush of the crowd, drunken, stupid, spontaneous. Urchins climb up on the cart, over the rails. They spit on the Queen of France, stick out their tongues at her. And the strongest, equable and assured, gives her a sounding slap. A vicious short fellow tickles her with his nail under her arm. Women raise her skirts and show her thighs to the populace. Coarse, catarrhic grunts of laughter.

The cart moves on, under the rain. Now, with its hoods, its umbrellas, the crowd takes on a sadistic, almost a diabolic aspect. Through the clouds a brief luminance pierces, of a watery green. Every image shines like a flake of moonlight. The Carmagnole pushes on, undaunted. On the cart, Marie-Antoinette wipes her cheeks, slowly. Her bonnet, blown by the wind, flutters like a beating wing agains the livid sky.

The procession reaches the Place de la Revolution. Here is the guillotine . . . Thunder joins in . . . Across the square, by flashes of lightning, the knife gleams . . .

Marie-Antoinette steps down from the tumbril. The square is black with people. At intervals, thunder fills it with gory echoes. Silence falls, as over water.

The queen walks toward the scaffold. She mounts the steps, one by one, and at each step the crowd recedes, lower, smaller. She mounts . . .

On the platform, the executioner seizes her. He snips off her waist, with great clicks of shears, an assistant ties her hands, casually, humming a love-song . . . Her bonnet is removed. Wonder of wonders! under it she wears a red rose in her hair . . . The mob stirs, stinking and scurrilous, and howls: "Off with the rose!" The rain has let up a little. But the

guillotine is all wet, like a tree. Little pearl-like drops hang from the blade.

Lafayette, in his Belgian night, trembles with horror and lets his sword slip. It falls on the secret stones, waking the mechanical cohort of fifteen horsemen, waking the sleepy old moon. He cries, Adrienne, Adrienne! For he has just recognized, on the platform, Madame de Lafayette, his wife . . . Yes, it is Adrienne, not Marie-Antoinette, her plump neck, her felucca-like shoulder, her beautiful serene full brow. Adrienne! Adrienne! He spurs his horse to a gallop. And that sudden mad gallop, in that fresh nocturnal Belgian landscape, looks like a shooting star . . . Suddenly Lafayette stops. He wipes his brow. . . . No, it is not Adrienne, it is Marie-Antoinette. There is no mistaking her beautifully molded throat, her large imperious eyes. Lafayette breaths deep, he even laughs maybe. . . . In those few moments. . . .

There, on the scaffold, the rose halts the execution. The mob cries: "Off with the rose!" "No, no," cries Marie-Antoinette, "let me die with this rose!" The executioner burst out laughing. He moves toward the Queen.

The Queen? . . . Adrienne? . . . Lafayette trembles, under the hallucinating Brabançon moon. Now he swears it is the queen, now his wife. . . . At

times, it is an ambiguous vision, a blending of the two. He gallops, bare-headed, his arms over his horse's neck. . . .

The executioner walks toward Marie-Antoinette, step by step, she falls back, tall, majestic. The carriage of a queen. . . . The soul of Adrienne. . . . She retreats, untouched, the rose in her hair. She retreats toward the fatal plank, with a sudden movement leans against it. . . . Everything rocks . . . the blade falls. . . .

Lafayette leans over the basket. . . . Ha! . . . Ah! It *is* Marie-Antoinette! . . .

Lafayette, taken prisoner by the Austrians, was confined at Olmütz. He remained there five years.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Why I Like the Man

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Why I Like the Man

TO begin with, he was a failure, the greatest failure in history. I like downfalls of that sort: Jeanne's bonfire, Christ's cross. Injustice sits well upon heroes. Happiness and glory, distributed in measured doses, have something banal, impersonal and vague. The man was, above all, a character of tragedy.

On two occasions, glory was his: in America, and in 1789. At the age of thirty, he was at his apogee; from then on, it was a steady fall, step by step, in the shadow of the guillotine, through prison, hatred and oblivion. . . . No man was so exalted or so debased. Lafayette was one of the few men who have known the two limits of Fortune, its loftiest pinnacle and its deepest abyss. In that, there is something of classical antiquity in his life, all marked, as it was, by Fatality and by the gods. He was a sort of Oedipus. Did not his own daughter, the Revolution, set a price upon his head?

Yes, what a charming thunderbolt it was when he

embarked for the New World at the age of nineteen. Nineteen! That was Jeanne D'Arc's age! And what a graceful pair they make, these two children of nineteen, the girl of the pastures and the Marquis of the Century, setting forth with the same step and on the same day for the conquest of the ideal. What pure laurels were his, when at twenty-four, he helped to found the United States! There lay the quintessence of Lafayette: in his vernal gesture, in his budding glory. Whatever was to happen later—and, Heaven knows, there was much in store for him—the adolescent was irreproachable. At this age, he had grace, he was brother to Marceau and Hoche. Had he died at the age of twenty-five, he would have died immortal.

Grace was his, and all the graces. He was a true Frenchman of France, the arch-type of the Frenchman. Sensitive, heroic, chivalrous, generous. Valor and courage were his right hand and his left. His, too, the little faults of the Frenchman (which are perhaps great ones): he was sprightly, an idealist, romantic, with a touch of madness! A marquis, too, to the tips of his fingers. And proud. Somewhere, he says of the grandees of Spain: "This morning I paid my homage to the King of Spain; I saw grandees who were small shakes indeed, especially when they

were on their knees." But he was a Marquis consecrated by Washington, baptized with American simplicity. Enthusiasm? By the bushel! For the Negroes, the Poles, the Protestants, etc. . . . He was, before the writing, a Rostand character. America in his heart played the rôle of the Faraway Princess. Lafayette's motto was *Cur Non.* Is this not the very motto of France?

In fine, he was a poet and a child. Imagination was his real, his cardinal crime. He never perceived or felt reality; he never believed in it. He lived, logical and sheer, in the heart of unreality, in the heart of super-reality. A super-realist of action. His eyes fixed ahead, he rode the mare of fiction; but reality kicks and rears. To be sure, he was scarcely built to govern men or circumstances, he had no knack for ruling, which is a purely objective art. There is also another tragic side of his destiny in that the man least made for plunging into politics did exactly that and no more. He was a poet, and a Romantic poet, that is to say an individualist, incommunicable. "Ah, I know what you are," said Madame de Lafayette to him one day. "You are a Lafayettist." He lived in a Lafayettist universe, in an enclosure of crystal. Life, unfortunately, is no Lafayettist. . . .

A child! Here again Lafayette resembles Jeanne

D'Arc, of whom Michelet writes: "This prolongation of childhood was a particularity of Jeanne D'Arc's; she remained a little girl, without ever becoming a woman." The same holds true of Lafayette; he too never grew to be a man. Throughout his career, he displayed a formidable candor and ingenuousness. All its action is unraveled on a rosy and smooth plane, logical and facile, the plane of childhood. He handled the world as a child handles a mechanical toy. A child against Life—so we see Lafayette as a somewhat pathetic figure.

In fine, a mystic, a monk, an apostle, a sectarian. In the France of his day, his religion was Liberty. Very much the zealot. The aged King of Spain, refusing to appoint him Governor of Jamaica, cried: "No, no, he would found a republic there!" A man of faith.

He was a true knight of the Middle Ages, the last *chevalier* of France. And, at the same time, the first modern man. Thus he forms the connecting link between medieval France, the France of the Crusades, and modern France. In him the great liberal, the first of the great modern liberals, clasps hands with Bayard, with Peter the Hermit, with King Arthur. Yes, he is of the lineage of the "chevaliers sans peur et sans reproche," of the Knights of the Round Table. The Revolution is his Holy Grail, America his Holy

Sepulchre. He is built to the scale of epic legend, of the Gesta Francorum—and also of Don Quixote and Arthur, he is the same knight, heads or tails. This marquis is the strange and supreme flower of the species.

He speaks and preaches like children and priests. He is verbal and gestual. Vaguely the troubadour, rose spectacles. Life is a song,—and he adds: the revolution is a song. A fine gesture—he never deprives himself of that. And what fine gestures they are, those two, giving, as they do, the best picture of Lafayette, both of them on a balcony before a sentimental crowd. On October 6th, at Versailles, when he kissed Marie-Antoinette, and in 1830, at the Hôtel de Ville, when he gave the accolade to the Duc d'Orléans! This is his style, his incomparable manner. . . .

Verbally, he has a writer's gift. He can use his pen to good purpose. Observe the joyous fashion in which he picks off Sieyès. "He is cowardly, choleric and cannot create a good impression; he can neither speak abundantly nor ride horseback; the fellow is an abbé in all the strength of the term." And what an unforgettable etching he makes of Frederick II in three strokes: "An old, dirty and decrepit corporal bespattered with Spanish tobacco." His Mémoires have air and tone. His letters to Madame de Lafayette are ex-

quisite. Consider: "As for 'Messieurs les Anglais, a reinforcement of 3000 lasses has just come to them from New York. We captured a vesselful of chaste wives from them" . . . "I like to build Castles in France of happiness and pleasure. You always form one half of them, my beloved." And, writing of his wound: "The Surgeons are amazed at the despatch with which it is healing. They fall into ecstasies everytime they bind it and declare it is the finest thing in the world." . . . (That is pure Sévigné!)

Finally, and above all, Lafayette is a sentimentalist, a great sentimentalist, in all his senses and to the marrow of his bones. There is his true grandeur and his obvious misery. For sentimentality is like the tongue, at once all good and all ill. He is no man who is not sentimental. But, on the other hand, the way to Hell is paved with sentimentalists. In Lafayette all the great humane sentiments find an echo, a native home. Honest, noble, righteous: to the depths of his heart. Is that enough? His life poses the whole problem of virtue before the tribunal of History. Good and stupid or intelligent and vile: *chi lo sa?* And yet all lies therein. Talleyrand or Lafayette? At all events Lafayette is a man, Talleyrand is not. (A superman, if he will, not a man.) Now I love man, his frail flesh, his heart. Let us remember,

too, that before Lafayette the champion of Calas and of the Chevalier de la Barre bends a knee (before his wife, at least, and in honor of the man), calling him the "defender of the great and just cause of the liberty of peoples." And Madame de Staël once wrote to him from Rome: "I shall hope for everything of the human race so long as you draw breath." Concerning Lafayette, Chateaubriand sneers, "a sort of simpleton." But the same Madame de Staël is there to answer: "If one can thus incur the reproach of being a simpleton, may our men of wit merit it for once."

Lafayette was what one will, but he was a man, a man of heart. He is the magnificent incarnation of the battleground of reality and the ideal that is in every creature. Victor or vanquished, what does it matter? His days were beautiful. If he erred, it was on the right side, on the side of the heart. I do not know that there is a single woman in the world who would dare hold it against him. He had the misfortune to mold a hand to the clay, he who was made for fight. At least, if he condescended to things, it was always on horseback, yes, on a white horse. Life moves forward at slow march, it analyzes and wavers; he took life at a gallop. Sombody, on July 14th, 1790, seeing him caracoling on the Champ de Mars, cried: "There goes Monsieur de Lafayette, galloping down the centuries!" That was not badly put.

I do not know that he was *admirable*, but I love him. And I pity the man who has not fifty per cent of Lafayettism in his heart. Shortly after marriage Lafayette wrote to his wife: "If I have a son, I shall tell him to know his heart well." The heart! Has all glory and all earthly beauty any other source than the heart? Lafayette, chevalier of the heart! Yes, if man is great through his heart, Lafayette is great. . . .

CHAPTER NINE

La Grange

"How pleasant I find it to bow before—a village mayor!"
—Lafayette.

CHAPTER NINE

La Grange

NOVEMBER: the seeding season. A theme of admiration to me that Nature, in the melancholy decline of autumn, plants the first germ, the first gesture of rebirth. The seasons also, in their way, seize and pass on the torch.

Victory had brought him liberty, and Lafayette returned to Paris in the first days of November, 1799. It was the morrow of the 18th Brumaire. "Napoleon now was emerging from Bonaparte."

Those two men, Bonaparte and Lafayette, are the antithesis of one another, fire and water. One realistic to the point of the bayonet, the other idealistic to the extreme of a prison, one a young crown prince of Me, the other a pedagogue of Liberty; and how would you make a posy with two antipodes?

Bonaparte was keenly aware of that antinomy. His scent was monstrous sharp at that age. For a time he must almost have feared Lafayette, that man of the popular heart, as a rival, or at least as a spoke in his wheels. His first word was: "He must not

return to France: never!" Gradually, however, as he came to know the beast, as he sounded him and weighed him, it is astonishing to see how he lifted his own paw, how friendly he became, how familiar, how indulgent even. At times they spent whole hours in tête-à-tête conversation. Between the two heroes, there is, at this moment, a period of graceful intimacy that proves quite charming. They spoke chiefly about the Revolution. "I was still only in the audience when you were on the stage," says Bonaparte, "*but I kept my eyes open!*" *

But this lasted no time. As soon as he saw Bonaparte, under cover but without gloves, emasculating, muzzling and abolishing liberty, Lafayette shied. He refused every office—a seat in the Senate, the Embassy to the United States—fiercely.

"You still feel yourself too active to sit in the Senate?" Napoleon flung at him.

At last, one fine day, he packed himself off, bag and baggage, bound for the fields.

He stayed there fifteen years.

* * *

Out of their immense fortune, all that remained to the Lafayettes was a property in Brie, fourteen miles from Paris. Chance (but does not life possess

* Italics earnestly mine.

an ethic logic, a sort of spontaneous Providence, balance and art in hand?) willed this property to be called La Grange, the granary.

Here Lafayette shut himself up in a hostile silence, in a mute opposition—"like the conscience of France," he said. It was the season of sowing.

This property of La Grange was in a pretty bad way. Imagine a sort of farm, with building used as stables, granaries, sheds; a stretch of fields; yonder, the woodland. In front of the master's house, a vast abandoned orchard. Everywhere that pallor, that gratuity, that indolence which are the characteristics and charms of the fallow-land.

Incontinently, Lafayette settled down to work. He surveyed, drew, cut down trees, planted seeds. Here was the fundamental process. He did it all with a superior ease. Let us see in gardens the abodes of Gods. The heroes in the course of the ages (from Cincinnatus to Washington) willingly combine their fate with their career. The plow easily marries the sword in antiquity. In the scales of Destiny, agriculture is the counterpart of glory. "You always come back to your garden . . ." says some one.

Here is a law too immemorial and too constant to fail to bear the mark of divinity in it. Let us observe that the Earthly Paradise was a garden. Man is incapable of imagining any other counterpoise to the

powers above, to pride, to strength and to love than their opposites, nakedness, dream, gardening? Be all or nothing.

Man struggles between his principle and his end: above, the reign of the spirit (God) calls upon him; below the vegetable kingdom. His destination and his source. There too is a sort of *vertical equilibrium*, the most instable in the world.

In fine, I know no higher spiritual pleasure than to draw a world out of oneself. A carrot you have sown, a forest you have planted, have an incomparable taste and sense. If I feed only on my own substance (and on the works of my substance, I call that swinging the full circle. It amounts to enacting the part of the first man.

The thought that, for the first man, everything is virgin! To live in the country is to live with all that is virgin. Such were the sentiments that nourished the inmost soul of Lafayette in the first days of his residence at La Grange, while his hands drew the tape or swung the pick. Day by day out of this waste land, squares of vegetables, alleys of thorn and box, hedges of beeches and bowers, a whole wonder of saps, of arrangement and order, emerged.

But the works of the earth have the vice of affecting only the epidermis. While the muscles are at work, a wide margin is left the spirit to cry out and

Château de La Grange-Blenau
From an old print

wander in. Lafayette, pruning knife in hand, could forget neither liberty nor Bonaparte.

Every morning his daughters came to bring him the day's news in his garden. The Consulate for Life, the Proclamation of the Empire, the victories of Austerlitz and Jena found Lafayette every day either amid his cabbages with an averruncator in his hand, or perched on his double-ladder, busy paring the pear trees. . . .

* * *

It was one morning; towards eight o'clock. The hoar-frost covered the ground and caught the young trees, the cabbages, and the salsify on the wing; the first rays of the sun darted the palest and the most rosy tones in the world. Lafayette, erect, at the top of a ladder, his heel curved and his right hand jutting out with a long pruning-shears towards the sky, was clipping a pear-tree. From time to time the crisp *click* of his shears through the frost sounded across the garden.

Suddenly he heard cool, sharp cries, the trotting of a young girl in a blue dress, bright laughter over numberless teeth:

"Father! Father!"

Lafayette pivots on his heel, he turns three-quarter-face.

"A victory! The Emperor has won a great victory at Austerlitz. . . . *Vive l'Empereur!*"

In a trice—was it emotion or pure instability?—the ladder totters; a long-armed body falls to the ground amid a deluge of branches. The child rushes away for help, servants come, they pick Lafayette up, they bear him back to the house. . . .

The neck of his thigh-bone was broken. His leg had to be imprisoned in an apparatus of continuous extension. It took a long time to heal. Moreover, Lafayette always held this leg rather stiff.

Austerlitz awakened in him, deep in him, that thirst for glory he had vainly tried to appease in the heart of his vegetables. Lafayette loved glory to the very lees. "I have always dreamed of glory," he himself writes with vigor. And again, in melancholy, "Fortune made me miss 1792. . . ." After Austerlitz, he realized he was *missing* the greatest epic in the world. Some one in France was reaping glory by the armful, and he, Lafayette, the man made for glory, stood twiddling his thumbs, powerless, in the depths of a garden. . . .

From then on, the shears weighed on his hands and the flowers seemed to him to be extinguished. Under the mechanical gesture of dressing or potting his plants, his imagination in a riding-coat and a little three-cornered hat galloped across the battle-fields of

Europe . . . with Napoleon! From that moment, and even more as time went by, his mind is *con*, but his heart is *pro*.

Things were kept secret from him. Madame de Lafayette attributed the accident to the emotion caused by the sudden announcement of Austerlitz. And she forbade any news from outside to penetrate to La Grange. They lived within themselves, without contact with the world.

Meanwhile Lafayette hungered and thirsted for these tidings of France, of the war, and of the Emperor. To know the news, even in secret, he stooped to ruses, to a child's tricks. He attracted to the orchard a young rascal of the neighborhood, drunk with marauding and vice, and, by dint of pennies and nuts, won his support. The child promised to come and announce the great public news to him, as soon as he himself heard them in the country. He arrived, one fine day, whistling like a blackbird, behind the wall of an enclosure. That was the signal. Lafayette in his orchard pricked up his ears. He cast a stealthy side-glance towards the house, then, with precaution, looking like innocence itself, he drew near to the wall: the lad was whistling admirably. Soon he raised his woolly head on a level with the wall, his nose shining with malice and filth, and, in a half-voice, pale and hasty, he uttered in jerks: "Great victory of

the Emperor at Jena . . . 30,000 Prussian prisoners . . . the Emperor is marching on Berlin. . . ." Then, a penny flew through the air, a lad jumped swiftly and a long silence ensued. . . . At the end of three minutes the sound of the young rogue in the distance, cutting capers as he moved away, his pockets jingling, whistling like a blackbird. . . .

Sometimes long weeks passed by without the child coming. In his changing orchard Lafayette weeded, sowed and watered every day—his ear to the wind. Did an oriole fly by, or a gray lizard rustle through the dry grasses? Lafayette raised his head. But no, there was no victory to-day. The grain began to sprout, the salad grew. Then one evening, suddenly, the warm chirping of the child, there, behind the wall. . . . And Lafayette slides, crawls almost, slyly, towards the wall. He stops. Now he is afraid for this stirring news a common little urchin bears on his lips. What if it were a disaster, if France were invaded? . . . In the depths of his conscience (a fact not to be admitted for a moment!) the pure liberal breathes a prayer for the usurpers. . . . He reaches the wall, on tenterhooks. . . . Up there, the little rascal points his face, all messy with blackberry-juice, over the crest of the wall. "Great news!" . . . Was he afraid? Was some one there? Lafayette's heart beats; it beats and beats. . . . The

suspense hurts him. "Come, come, where are you?" The hilarious and sweating face of the lad reappears, the child plants himself astride the wall. He tells, in boyish jargon, the exploits of the Grande Armée. . . .

Days passed. Months—not months, indeed, seasons. Everything here was measured in terms of fruit and flower. The Russian campaign coincided with an amazing year for grapes; the trellises bent under the weight of great full-breasted bunches. The Battle of Lützen appeared with the first cherry on the precocious tree of Lot No. 3.

Thus battles are married to changes of wind, war to florescence. The day of Champaubert, the whistling child had a sore on his lip. This gave the battle a lisp full of quaintness.

* * *

There are two great seasons for the kitchen-garden. In winter the cabbage season, in summer the string-bean season. Of course there are also peas, carrots, asparagus; but these are merely trifles in the vast ordering of time. The true vegetable rhythm is dual.

Lafayette, in this familiar life with the simple organic laws, with his family, his wife, his two daughters, his grandchildren (George Washington Lafayette, his son, was a subaltern in the Hussars), led a brutal, elemental existence. His valet was an Indian

whom he brought from America and who called him Father. Every one spoke English. Sometimes some American, traveling in France, came to visit him. Sometimes they evoked the fine muscular years. Then once more a naked silence, the farm of Brie and its humble alternating works. . . .

In this idea of retreat, in the choice of this agricultural existence lies Lafayette's constant care: to imitate Washington. La Grange, Mount Vernon. . . . All his life, the pure model obsessed him. Washington had died in 1799, but Lafayette had still kept up his relations with the great artisans of Independence. From La Grange, amid the leisures of the country, he entertained a continuous correspondence with Jefferson, then President of the American republic. In their letters they spoke of politics, of friendship, and, above all, of gardening. Seeds taken from the gardens of Mount Vernon were sent to him. For some time moreover he was wholly absorbed in acclimating several American species to French soil. Here was a subtle and hardy game, one which directed the mind along the road to great natural secrets.

Napoleon, Washington—here, then, are the two panels of Lafayette's mirror as he stays in his orchard, solitary and infirm. Now the splendid whistling lad, now a letter from America, place him in communica-

tion with the two powerful poles of his dream. . . . But he awakes, a planter of cabbages. . . . That is what lends a terrible value of humanity to the drama of this great imagination, imprisoned in silence and leisure. This farm of La Grange seems at moments to me to be more pathetic than the battlefield of Waterloo.

A beat of his wing to the right, a beat to the left, and then the fall into the charms of mediocrity. There are plenty of subtle reasons for believing that a radish may be the equivalent of a victory, without considering the course of one's life. But why may not both of them?

Gradually Lafayette took part in the life of the neighborhood. His imagination was sufficient, it made the world of his farm. Once a year, however, he established a contact—a precarious contact—with society: he appeared in the village, on the day of its patron Saint.

A great event occurred. In 1807, Madame de Lafayette died. As we know, she had joined her husband in the dungeons of Olmütz. Here she contracted a terrible malady that devoured her for a long time and finally snuffed out her life. It was, for Lafayette, a consubstantial loss. She had loved him "in Christian fashion, as is socially proper, and passionately," as she herself confessed in three expres-

sions which, in their pudent dissonance, unfold a tale. Her last words were: "I am all yours!" And she who during the Revolution signed her letters "the woman Lafayette," she whose profession of faith was "I am a Lafayettist," had meant to him not only a woman but, heart and sex, all woman, or rather, womanhood.

1807. Her death was bound up with the bloody campaign of Eylau. The child himself, the child of the annunciation appeared on the evening of Friedland with a great scar on his cheek. It was, he said, a scratch from a raspberry-bush. But the scar was so violet, Friedland so empurpled, and death everywhere so fresh and so thick, that the man had a right to imagine some great coalition of the elements. Soon it was Lützen, then the talismanic and infernal Leipsic.

Thus the days wore along, from hay-making to fertilizing; from the breeding-time to the time of shearing, and from smouldering Moscow to Montmirail in April, Lafayette awaited the end. At the period of the campaign of France, he felt a sudden attack of appetite. It boiled in his being together with the sentiment of the motherland repulsed and the impatience of the silent man. Victory at random from Champagne to the Ile-de-France. But in this

very rapidity, in these flashes of glory, he read all the signs of the huntsman's death-halloo. The warbling child appeared more often, ever more often, and his cry from the top of the wall became hoarse and guttural. The Allies were marching on Paris.

Lafayette's patriotic fiber was ever acute. The black stones of fortune bruised his loins blue. He spent these last days in fever and excitement, striding up and down with great steps. He prowled through his orchard from morning till night awkward and vague, living literally only through and for the child warbler. He moved forward through the pungent garlic, between the celery, from hothouse to seed plot, busy with everything, interested in nothing, anxious, full of fancies and mad. It was on one of these oppressive evenings when between two allies he discovered the girls' bivouac.

There were five or six little girls there of eight or ten years of age, granddaughters of Lafayette and their friends. They were playing soldiers. They had tied their dresses between their legs, like Zouave's trousers, and, petticoated and grave, they drilled and then suddenly went into action.

After the fall from the ladder, no one ever mentioned the war at La Grange, at least openly or when the family was assembled. Nobody knew anything. But the children must no doubt have heard tags of

conversation here and there haphazard. For a moment they stifled it within them. But outside, in the open air, especially in the case of the girls, all of it burst out of their pores, everything poked a nose over the hedges of restriction. They burned with victories and exploits, these tender epic mites. All of them were secretly soldiers.

Lafayette, hidden behind a hedge of thornwood, livid, his heart thumping within him, contemplated that squad of little girls drunk with heroism under the April trees. He stood there motionless, bewildered, panting. And under his fixed gaze, the childish pseudo-Zouaves called to each other: "Hey, Murat, this way!"—"Prince Eugene, will you leave your nose alone?"—"Lucile, you be Marshal Ney."—The whole band lined up—and what a pretty row of blond heads all along the fruit-wall—then, warm of eye and with index-finger raised, they all cried out together: "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

Lafayette could bear it no longer. In silence, on all fours, he scurried away. Liberty . . . the motherland . . . the Emperor. . . .

On April 20th, came news of Napoleon's abdication. Lafayette without a word bursts into tears. . . .

He set off for Paris to try to save something in the débâcle. The Restoration. What a time the

Bourbons lost in personal quarrels, in epithets and projects! Suddenly the Eagle lands, he flies from steeple to steeple. During the night of March 20th, Louis XVIII flees from the Tuileries. A few moments afterwards, Napoleon enters. The bed of the King is still warm, his mistress in it; Napoleon goes to bed.

Lafayette took the road to La Grange once more.

That year, 1815, was a year of roses. Lafayette had installed a model rose-garden at La Grange. From the first days of May it was an enchantment.

* * *

Meanwhile, far from the roses, Destiny was working. The great Corsican gambler, once more in luck, staked everything. Ah, that prodigious week of Waterloo! On June 12th, Napoleon leaves Paris; on the 15th, he beats the Prussians at Ligny; on the 18th, he succumbs at Waterloo. In a week, a victory, a disaster, the destinies of the Man, of France, of Europe. . . .

It was the greatest week since Creation.

CHAPTER TEN

The Caroonaro

CHAPTER TEN

The Carbonaro

THE Bourbons popped up like a jack-in-the-box. France rubbed its eyes. What? so many and such powerful events, the Revolution, the Empire, glory and blood—was all of it in vain? A click and there they were, mere nobodies as before.

The Emperor of Russia said of the Bourbons: "They have learned nothing and they are incorrigible." In point of fact, if the Bourbons lightly tossed the people a Charter to gnaw like a bone, behind that screen they were busy reconstituting, *restoring* pure France, the France of before 1789. The *unfindable Chamber* was there for once in its life. On the other hand, passions once more exploded, but in contrary sense—a step backward, the law of the pendulum. A wave of violence, of banishment, of murders (assassination of General Brune, execution of Marshal Ney, etc. . . .) broke over France. The White Terror.

Far away in the solitude of La Grange, Lafayette shuddered day after day. For he, too, was an *ultra:*

he had forgotten nothing and learned nothing. Already in 1812, Napoleon had said of him: "Everyone in France has learned his lesson; a single man has not: Lafayette. He has never given an inch. You see him quiet; well, I, for my part, can tell you he is ready to begin the whole business over again."

To begin over again: how heavy with meaning, heavy with destiny the word is in Lafayette's life.

As soon as he saw this kick administered to liberty, these excesses and this bloodshed, the old enemy of the "red Jacobins" discovered himself afire with the same revolt against the "white Jacobins." All there was for him to do was to *begin the Revolution over again.*

He began it over again.

In 1818, he was elected Deputy of the Sarthe. He set off for Paris with the heart and the faith—if not alas! with the physical flame and the grace—under the star of a conscript, anyhow.

When he appeared on the rostrum—(it was on the occasion of the electoral law)—and when all of a sudden Parliament saw this old man of sixty looming high above them, arisen from heaven knows what limbo, his face colorless and the look of one disinterred, almost unreal under his too-blond perruque; when they heard his lips from beyond the century

mournfully murmur: "Gentlemen, when for the first time in a great many years I am raising a voice that the old friends of liberty will still recognize . . ." then a deathly shudder shook the entrails of the Assembly. For a few moments, before these men with dilated pupils, the very image, palpable and amazing, of the Revolution, rose monstrously under the features of this old smooth-skinned and bald ghost. They stared at each other, their arms hanging limply, in an incalculable silence, a prey to all the hallucinations of memory and of red blood. A whole great wall of the Past, a conglomeration of principles, of guillotinades and of glories, had just found immediate incarnation in an instant of wonder. And before the phenomenal vision, these poor pallid deputies, tarnished with simple humanity, sat dumbfounded, tottering, like so many little boys lost. Up there, he spoke, his eyes the extinguished eyes of some immense blind man, his delivery dull, with but rarely a gesture. It smelled vaguely of a corpse. The scene under a blinding light and with its dry sepulchral train looked like some resurrection. All of them, inert of mind, their fingers taut, wondered: Is this the Statue of the Commander, or Lazarus, re-arisen? . . .

The old man threw himself into the mêlée with sword and body. He battled with all his might against the bundle of the anti-liberal laws: the law

suspending individual liberty, the law on censorship, the law on elections. It was a hell-bent Chamber. For example, there was the case of genial old Monsieur de Chauvelin, who was a liberal and who fell sick the day of the ballot. The youths of the Schools rushed to his house, kidnapped him, raised him, quartered, on a sedan-chair, and all of them, pushing and pulling, gee up! giddy up! dragged him zigzag, cloppety-clop, to the Palais Bourbon, so he might vote against the measure.

But Lafayette soon understood there was nothing to be done with this Chamber of *ultras*. A handful of liberals squirmed in this mass in vain. He turned his attention directly towards the people. He had always found his true genius here, in an immediate, substantial and connatural communion with the vast crowd.

At that time *carbonarism* was growing and thriving in France. The sect, Italian originally, found in France under the Restoration, its adequate terrain and climate. The word, of course, is of lyrical formation. It means charcoal-burning and it evokes the woodland origins of the movement, its enchanted birth in the thicket, at the hour of the moon and perhaps of the nightingale, in some small charcoal-burner's cabin. From these rustic beginnings, from this arborescent background, from these links with nature and the sky, carbonarism always retained a kind of glistening hue,

a nocturnal air of mystery and dream which, upon my word, were thoroughly romantic. In reality it was a rude group of men, half-Bonapartist, half-Republican. The basic unit was the *vente;* above it came the central *ventes*, then the high *ventes* and finally the supreme *vente*. In the last, they plotted with all their might. It was the era of plots.

Lafayette soon became President of the supreme *vente*—in fact, the chief of French carbonarism.

He threw himself into this work with a strange temerity, the great gesture of a man who stakes his all. This sexagenarian felt himself conquered. Grace was his no longer. Nothing succeeded and the rebuff his efforts met in the Chamber had broken his spirit. He who had never done anything except by luck, now found luck turned against him. He was sure of it, it made him bite his fist to the bone. What was he to do against Destiny? His soul a prey to some instable and mute malaria, he wandered from the frontiers of possibility to impossibility. That second Revolution he dreamed of barked its shins at every second on grains of sand. Nothing doing, little man! And the impotent nerves of the old man contracted for an imaginary challenge, for some supreme struggle. . . .

On all sides, disillusions and cold showers rained on him. In the Chamber, they execrated him as though

he were the plague. They shut him up on all occasions, pitilessly they shooed him off. It was a concert of "Will you be quiet?"—"He thinks he's still on his white horse!" Somebody lashes him: "Have you been asleep ever since October 6th?" Another day, the great orator Monsieur de Serre hurls this terrible apostrophe at his head: "When civil war breaks out, the blood is on the head of those who provoked it. The previous speaker is better aware of this than any other man. More than once, with death in his soul and shame on his brow, he has learned that whoever incites a raging mob is forced to follow it, almost to lead it."

All this stabbed him to the quick; it bled his imagination. Nearly seventy years old! Remember that weak failing arm of Don Diègue's! The abominable drama of volition and inability, the drama of impotence. And in a high-born heart. What further could he do? Die? Now he felt in him the wild spirit of a sectarian, the soul of a martyr. Death is a vengeance, too. He let himself go, breathlessly. He hungered for the end. Twenty times he was almost arrested. The government saw him behind every plot. "I have already lived very long," he said. "It seems to me I would be ending my career fittingly by ascending the scaffold." And when Lafitte said to him one day: "You are a statue in search of its pedes-

tal, little would you care were it a scaffold!"—"Quite true!" answered Lafayette.

This period in Lafayette's life, this supreme anguish in his bones, this assembling of all his lights, all his breath for one supreme blow, this tête-à-tête with Destiny evokes the hunter's halloo at the death of the stag. This panting tissue of speeches, of bravado, of plots, one after another,—this was Lafayette's private Campaign of France.

All these speeches missed fire, all these plots collapsed, one after the other; the Plot of Vincennes (August 19th, 1820), the Plot of Belfort (1821), the Plot of Saumur (1822). All France was a-tremble. The heart of the heavens felt its cords tighten. The affair of the Four Sergeants of La Rochelle inflamed even children at the breast. They were four, they were young, they were handsome. They mounted the scaffold like turtle-doves. I remember their plaint which made my childhood weep. My father used to recite it to me in the evening by candlelight and his voice, at the pathetic passages, broke like a reed.

Each kissed the other with tender breath
*They stood their ground brave unto death.**

* Complaynte in Provençal.

So ran the song. And I, seated by the fire where the vine-twigs sparkled and crackled with a sort of holy anger, I trembled through all my little bones. I saw the four white young fellows, their necks bare, climbing the steps to their death, their heads high, in the center of a vast square of bayonets, and I heard distinctly the gritting of teeth, the heartbeats of a whole people irritated and touched. The youngest, it seems, could not hold back a tear that was too heavy. But the plaint adds:

"And if a tear was seen to flash
Each buried it in his mustache."

My meager fists tightened in my pockets full of buttons (in those days children played buttons), and feeling my eyes swell and ripen in the shadow illumined by fires of every sort, I regretted that I too did not have a mustache to conceal that idiotic flow of tears surging I knew not whence. And things moved crescendo, half child's play, half Chanson de Geste, naive and moving:

"The first cried: Vive la Liberté!
The second: Vive la Liber . . .
The third: Vive la Li . . .
And the fourth: Vive la . . ."

and at this final touch:

"*But even Death understood them!*"

I bathed the gleaming ashes with my tears and, between my young teeth, intact and full of fire, I stammered, terrified: "Liberty, liberty. . . ."

* * *

Lafayette was astounded. So much blood rested upon his conscience, upon him, the chief. He became timid, vacillating—the movement of the pendulum, left, right. . . . Doubt gnawed at his liver. Soon his taut nerves cried aloud for a respite, were it even in death. A terrible dejection weighed down his shoulders to below zero. He felt himself low, sad. An immense need of silence clutched at his throat, a need of solitude gripped his heart. An invasion of tears. . . . He stood at bay. . . .

It was the day appointed for a sensational plot. Everything was ready and promised well. They waited for Lafayette to give the signal. But he was at La Grange. He could not make up his mind to start. A force, or a weakness, unknown and omnipotent, nailed him down to the place. Without his being able to help it, his pupils were seated together, his legs at the point: Stop. His bodv no longer obeyed

him, it no longer belonged to him. Suddenly an inspiration seized him; he remembered it was the anniversary of his wife's death. He stepped back, transported by a monstrous, unnatural joy. Now he had the great excuse for waiting, for staying. He locked himself up all day in his wife's death-chamber. He nourished himself on sentiment, he was drunk on tears. At last, at last he had time to weep! . . .

Even in the Chamber, for months now, he had kept silence. The corporeal in him was fed up. He only addressed the House once, at the time of the memorable Manuel affair. Manuel, the great orator of the Liberal Opposition, had just been excluded from the Chamber. He declared he would yield only to force. On the morrow, eluding the vigilance of the Sergeants, he suddenly appeared again in his seat, falling from the clouds or spurting out of their consciences, his hair neat, his jabot immaculate. The president appealed *manu militari.* A detachment of the National Guard entered in breeches with elephant-facings and plumed caps. Sergeant Mercier was ordered to expel Manuel. The sergeant blushed, looked at his men; they looked at the whites of each others' eyes. And suddenly all of them in unison threw their muskets on the floor and crossed their arms in silence over their hearts. Cries of: *Vive la Garde Nationale* burst through the House. The Opposi-

tion danced deliriously. The President grew furious. A picket of gendarmes ran up charging. Colonel de Foucault drew his sword. "Soldiers, do your duty!" The gendarmes seized Manuel by the arm and the neck. He stood up, crimson, his blood in his eyes, against a background of black deputies shaking their fists amid a din of desks being struck, of feet and of bayonets. . . . At last he yielded and left the room, enveloped in that luminous halo that puissant passions ever secrete. . . .

All the Left, Lafayette at the head of them, walked out of the Chamber.

Heartsick, half-ill, he took refuge at La Grange.

He went alone, on horseback. It was hot, one of those first poignant and singular suns of March. He rode forward, his soul still black with anger under the acid and vivid sky. His very horse as though scenting spring across the blue hawthorns, capered in jerks, drunk with a cool vertigo.

Lafayette was hot and thirsty. He was thinking confusedly of Manuel, of the Four Sergeants of La Rochelle. The weather was dazzling. Cries at every moment emerged from the thickets, musical wheat. He rode forward, his ears buzzing, his eyes floating. . .

Soon he began to sweat like an ox. He rode through a cloud of horse-flies. He stopped, dismounted, sat heavily on the ground. Shafts of oaks of pines rose

to his eyes. There was a charcoal-burner's hut there.

Suddenly a sergeant, shining and new appears in a four-leaf clover. A second one shows the tip of his nose at the fork of a hedge. A third glides over the moss. A fourth balances on a cloud. Four sergeants! Lafayette starts up, and the noise of his fingers crackles like a metal. The four sergeants scamper about the fields, playing leap-frog. A legendary brilliance inundates space. He arises. His feet tintinnabulate over the luminous leaves. The sun coils about the trees, plays hop-scotch with the birds, impales itself on a stone. The hearing echoes every sound. Brief orders ring out in crystal sabots. "Soldiers!" On the left, a fragment of sky falls like a chopper. Then: "Have you always been asleep?" Whence come these voices? Lafayette turns around. There is only a charcoal-burner's hut there. *Charbonnerie, carbonari: cuckoo, cuckoo!* He draws near this hut, hopping across the ground. It is empty. But already, in the distance a cuckoo begins to sing, a cuckoo, fairy-bird. A gust of wind shakes the great red pines, whence fall drops of blood. At the crest of a filbert tree a lady-bug scintillates. Everything assumes reversed proportions, upside-down, in a spiral. Shadows in red breeches run from one trunk to another amid a crackling of barks. Sergeant Mercier crosses his arms, Lafayette cries: "*Vive la Garde*

Nationale!" His voice awakens the enchanted air about him. On all sides arise dance-steps, whispers of Psst! *psst!* and nails of mother-of-pearl, shining. Earth lurches under a curious hilarious sun, diabolic and thin. Lafayette totters. He sees red. He cuts himself a stick in the thicket, and throws himself madly into space. He hits hard, against the shining mosses, into the bushes, against branches. "Here, Danton! Take this!"—"Charles X. That's for you!" He gallops along, dazzled, in the magic thicket; his long mechanical sixty-five year old legs cut the grass; perspiration shines on his face like sunlight. He gallops forward, half-Don Quixote, half-Garibaldi—he pursues the imaginary, or interior reality; he pursues himself. . . . But he strikes a maple stump, he stumbles, he falls flat. . . .

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Land of His Dreams

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The Land of His Dreams

AT the elections of February 25th, 1824, Lafayette was not re-elected. He dropped everything and took ship for America.

Surfeited with defeat, weary, aging now, what should he find in America but the clime of his springtide, the land of heavenly grace and earthly glory? Lafayette, after all, had never succeeded, except in America, at the age of twenty. There is the source of his Fortune, there the gold of his crown. Whenever he grows despondent, disenchanted or say merely mortal in Europe, he dreams of America. Yes, America is his land of dreams.

Lafayette made America, but America also made Lafayette. His return to it in 1824 was rightly a consecration. Hearing across the seas the echoes of those cheers and ovations, France realized that, after all, Lafayette was Lafayette. "The ovations he received in the United States have singularly promoted him," Chateaubriand admits. And a Yankee orator

had said to him: "Sir, you stand here amid posterity." Viewed in that light, this voyage proved a matchless safeguard for his memory, a coronation.

It was a bowl of milk for his spirit. He left France physically and morally exhausted. During the entire crossing (from July 12th to August 15th) and no matter how resplendent or pearly the sea or sky, as at times they were, he sat day after day like a child, leaning against the poop, turning his back on the Old World, his arms and his imagination and his heart unreservedly open to the Land ahead, the Land of his dreams.

And there, over the seas, America rose as one man to welcome him, to apotheosize him. Youthful nations have stout hearts, substantial beefy hearts. On the waterfront of New York, so soon as he set foot on that valid soil, three hundred notables rushed to his arms. That gives the keynote. Never was man amid a nation rejoicing more heaped with glory, incensed with more love. Friendship, gratitude, faith are sentiments essentially sound, direct, manly. If nations are to be measured by their hearts, America gauged itself that day forever. The celebration had almost a winning bridal hue. Cold and patriarchal as that race was, it was eminently just that it should embrace at once the most mad and the most knightly of heroes.

In New York two hundred thousand men were waiting for him. The bells—the brand new bells—were ringing. The cannon, cravated with the colors of France, thundered in salvos. An army corps, the Lafayette Guards, was drawn up in a living hedge (each soldier wore the hero's portrait over his heart). To every flag was tied a ribbon with this device: *Welcome, Lafayette!*

Through this multitude he advanced in a carriage drawn by four white horses, down an enormous triumphal way, planted with palms, and trees from Virginia. The bands were playing *Home, Sweet Home!* The procession advanced, brilliant with clusters of girls and cries of gleeful children, under the barbarous arches of triumph, keeping step with the virgin stallions. Innocent cloudlets floated in a bare, laved sky. The winds galloped unchecked. Lafayette advanced. At the windows, women tendered him from afar their freeborn babies, like modern Madonnas.

The City greeted him like the cities of antiquity: "Hail, friend of our fathers! Welcome to our shores! Blessed are our eyes to behold your memorable features! Yours is a triumph accorded neither to conquerors nor to monarchs: the triumph of knowing that in all America there is not a heart that does not beat with joy at the sound of your name!"

He was received by Congress in solemn session. The senators rose and stood bare-headed to welcome him. As he entered the House of Representatives, the congressmen rose and stood for a minute in silence. And by way of more material token of their gratitude, the American people voted him an endowment of two hundred thousand dollars, plus a grant of land of twenty-four thousand acres.

Followed a triumphal tour of the twenty-four States of the Union. He was lionized, fought for like a white blackbird. He was declared a "guest of the Nation," and the least little hamlet looked on him with dewy eyes. He was smothered with honors and pious obeisance. "I fear that so much affection will be the death of you," President Jefferson wrote to him. He denied no one, he spared himself no effort to please his public. Ah! that popularity which he craved so deeply, he had it now: he was up to the gills in it! Whole villages would turn out to see him go by. Bands of women would walk two hundred miles to look on his eyes. He felt light, buoyant, be-starred, in a mood of recumbent enchantment, carnation delight, as in the warm brilliance of blinding midsummer, when all the world pulses. . . .

Mount Vernon! There his friend Washington slept. He wanted to see his garden full of musing pansies, his evergreen monument.

Lafayette on His Return to America, 1824

From the painting by Ary Scheffer

He descends the steps, alone. That strange silence of the tomb, alive with non-existence; a kind of cat-like purr; the turbine of eternity. His groping hand runs over the walls, dank, like a mucous membrane. Overhead a spot of light, geometric, guillotined. Below a gummy, plump shadow. What else? The beating of his heart, like a threshing-machine. He recalls the great True Blue, grave and smiling, politics in his right hand and his left fondling a gilded mulatto girl, sees him even-hearted and masterly alike in camp and at the plow, always sure of himself, every inch a man. And now! . . . Lafayette is sixty-eight. To sleep beneath the earth: for the blind that prospect may please. He descends, step by step. His hand toys in his pocket with a key (what key?). His nerves, as he descends, step by step, twitch with brief retracting spasms. Ants (what ants?) lick the sole of his foot. The stone draws his feet downward, light raises his hair, his blood. He feels himself drawn and sundered. Instinctively, he hunches his shoulders, narrows his loins, as if to bury himself, alive, in some mystery. A tear pearls his eyelids, he shakes his head, it will not fall. . . .

Here he is now, in the depths of the tomb, face to face with glory, face to face with death. A smell of insects emanates from the hole, a smell of incest. . . (glory and death, twin-sisters). Ha, those

two brave specimens of humanity, here they are, almost one, linked with gloom, in the opaque past; one already dissolved into dust, the other in progress of decomposition, equal and indissoluble in the depths of the same tomb; one horizontal like the slabs and like laws, the other vertical like all things that perish and fall. Together they learn, together they teach, that all has an end, and soon too.

Lafayette shudders, chilled, chilling. He kisses the stone; he feels his lips riven, paralyzed on the stone. . . .

From that rigid *tête-a-tête* he withdrew, backwards. He ascended those same steps, in a sterile dream. Up there, in the air, all the wide sky of Virginia, all space eager and crying, were hardly able to marrow his empty members, to repeople his vacant eyes. At last he breathed again. . . .

Pursuing his pilgrimage, he moved on through Virginia. Virginia country! He spent long days steeping his spirit, his marrow, in limpid memories. He went from one battlefield to another, plucking on one a bit of hawthorn, picking up on another a soldier's button; here runs the brook where he drank, there the site of a moonlit camp. That old man trailing his own tracks was grubbing for who knows what delight, the shadow of his glory, the reflection of his springtide.

He was groping for his big-breasted Fortune, the energy of his young manhood, all the rosy flushed face of bygone days. His old veins he gorged with grass and glory; his old bones he stoutened with carnation-dyed airs. He tickled his nerves, he quickened his skin, sniffing the odor of his exploits on the prairies. Like one who lights a fresh cigarette with an old stump, he fired his heart for a fleeting moment from the ashes of his youth.

He spent several days in Yorktown—Yorktown, the gem of his crown!—in a little rustic house, its gables mossy to-day, which well I know; I have seen the tiny garden enclosed with painted boarding and the laurel tree which the hero planted, as well he might, in that dim long-ago with his own hands; I know the bed where he lay (I lay in it, one night) a narrow low bed, almost a child's cot, in walnut wood. There, I dare say, he ate with his companions, the usual meals: fried eggs, ham and apple sauce, beef with peach jam, and, at the end of the meal, fish with a garnish of onions; while, beside the table, a mechanical bird, perched on a stand like a painted hill, warbled its well-primed airs. . . .

He was invited everywhere, to Louisiana, to the Quakers, and to the Indians. And his hungry soul (it was Indian Summer in his soul) awoke echoes wherever he went. There is an age, late in life, when

a man feels the need, all manhood spent, of sinking, with closed eyes, low and void, in the deep arms of a mother; when the old man craves a new virginity. He journeyed on, through the States, on horseback. The two Carolinas, Georgia, saw him pass fresh and blooming on the scent of his own recollections. Happily he pursued his way through those free and fertile lands. The trot of the horse excites a strange organic elation. Hour after hour he urged his horse through vast fields of grain, and there, to all intent alone, from morning to night, half entangled by his mount, his thighs, in the sure substance of the living sap, and by that token in the very womb of the world, he felt himself qualified to face the light realms of the spirit, fluid rays, and scents and dreams and the ethereal void. And thus he formed in those stark savannas the perfect image, so long vainly conceived and pursued, of a body of his soul full; yes, the very likeness of a moral centaur. At last he had gained the sense of poise, of balance, a kind of horizontal balance, between earth and sky. He fancied himself outside of Time, a little child or a patriarch, as he pleased. The concept of age is the appanage of Man. Animals know but one age, the present. Man, animalize yourself, fifty per cent, I should say. God-gild your soul, and animalize your body. Between those twain you will see Pan peep.

On he rode, his legs level with the grain, the tufts flicking his skin. Whenever he concentrates and specializes, Man loses his center of gravity. Lafayette suddenly recovered it there; in those good lands blowing with cotton and grain, he found it anew in a universal communion.

Now he was climbing the passes of the Alleghany Mountains, moving through the chain of that beautiful name. In his veins throbbed a principle of life more smooth and unobstructed than ever before. Life seemed to him a something round, like a drop of milk. For the first time he understood the symbol of the sphere; if all things in the world are round, stars, sexes and hearts, is not the circle the key of life?

From the pure heights of the Alleghanies he scanned the plains to the west. He tottered with purity. He began the descent, heedless and proud, like Moses, from hill to hill, from turn to turn, toward the Promised Land. Ah, the peace of that world before 1830, before 1834! Even the horse breathed more blessedly. At each meander of the way, against the light, two wings of sunlight sprouted. The hanging reins wove him a breast of arabesques.

There, below, the climate, supple and jaspered like the cry of the partridge, giddied his spirit. After the continental temperature, after the fresh chill of the heights, this slide toward the warm plain, toward

times calm, smooth, delicate, was like a dream. The everlasting lure of alluvial lands, of shores, of all that is feminine in the charms of the soil! He rode down and down, and at every turn the balm of the air grew a degree sweeter. Now came the winds off the sea, the essences of the south, the odorous plants, the empurpled bays. The waistcoat hangs unbuttoned, the shirt is laid open at the throat. The lungs are pumping. Here are the first fruit-trees, lean and delicate. The folds of the soil are full of thick sunlight. Columns of rays support the pines with outstretched arms. On the slopes lie snowy patches of light. The lines of the landscape, vertical and stiff on the heights, here grow supple, unfurl and play. The light grows ample, substantial, golden. All things grow familiar, play peek-a-boo with the senses. You wade into the suavity of the world as into the sea. Step by step you approach (and suddenly enter) a state of feeling that is life—humanity. And which here has the flow, the flush of pleasure.

In Louisiana he took a keen interest in his old friends, the blacks. They were numerous—whole colonies of them. And not so unhappy as you think. "The blacks," says Comettant (*Three Years in the United States*) "are well-fed, adequately clothed, and work less, I am sure, than the great majority of artists and writers who labor for a living." Lafayette was

amazed by all he saw. Those sleek climes, their paradisial flora, their energy, their radiance, swelled his breast. And that vast Mississippi fecundating land and air!

He sailed up the Mississippi as far as Fayetteville, on a curious Creole steamboat. Two sailors and a cabin-boy made up the crew. Throughout this trip, the melancholy and mysteries of water aggravated the sensibility of the country.

The boat, pushing up-stream, opened up a foaming path, rainbow-hued by a patch of sky. The buzz of the engines was drowned in water or air, each more splendid than the other. The cabin-boy, leaning over the running river, was making wishes, no doubt, unless he was merely wasting time.

Since the days of Chateaubriand's description, the old Meschacebe had not paled nor waned. It still wore that streaked complexion that recalls the snows from which it flows, and still pursued its course like the neck of a buffalo. A little warmer maybe, at least as seen from the height of that churning hulk. Nothing so renders the idea of fatherhood as such a mass of waters. The river rolls in its bed like the planets in their orbs. It heads on and on under a vast Creole sky, streaked with blue and yellow stripes. The furnishing of the world expands here. The shelves of

sand, the trees, the birds, the clouds on the horizon, everything assumes a horizontal pose. Every atom is utterly at ease, takes its full form and development. Nature is nothing, unresistant. Floods of water stream without shores across the spongy and semi-mobile savannas, rolling pell-mell whole loads of prairie, coasts of whirling sand, colonies of beavers. Occasionally some liquid eddy enmeshes and blends foliage, sand, vines, compacts them all, amalgamates them with yellow alluvial mud. These form natural rafts, on which in a tropical instant sprout plantains and begonias and thus panoplied and arrayed, flying before the wind, they float down stream at random. Isles of slime, where whole series of teal paddle and splash, drunk with worms, emerge in endless file. Here and there some great reddish pine, foundered root and branch on a bed, rears to heaven its keel of roots, on which alight in turn the eagle with its neck of state and the kingfisher of the dawn. Yonder, on the bank, the pelicans are busy and the musk-rats, in chase of dragon-flies. A heron pecks the gravel with beak and claw. The ringdove or the *whip-poor-will*, on a maple or tulip-tree, flute their pearly cries at intervals. In the dim distance, the solitary belling of the deer swells and dies.

All this world teeming, daubed, delirious, pantheistic, sensual and prodigious, at once an earthly Para-

dise and a Deluge. The air is warm, moist, milky. It smells of gum, of musk. The sun falls on the river with all its weight. Under the shock, the song of the doves capsizes, and a flaming serpent climbs the sky, Mississippi-scrubbed, like a caduceus. Large pink fish rub their sides in a flash of scales. Guinea-hens cry, shrill, ardent, dying. Two alligators, yawning, sluggish, sniff the stern, and rub noses with it for a moment. Gradually, under the enamored firmament, everything is a tangle of desires, appetites, possessions. The yearning of three substances, animal, vegetable, mineral. Sometimes the boat skims some torrid islet; at the shock it awakes and scatters: a clump of ants! Woodpeckers and cardinal-birds raddle incontinently. Two flamingoes, fused to the neck, enjoy their pleasure motionless. Crystalline insects, by the myriad, waltz on the beams, tail to tail. Cranes in couples fall from the sky, with beating wings, bundles of love. You see water-snakes launching in pairs, entwined and blent to their serpentine marrow, metaphysical and ecstatic in the gleaming current. All things that swim, fly or crawl, or that throb or beam, even to the water-drops, even to the molecules of the air, all wheel and veer, all exult and swoon and melt, in the large unity of the day.

Blinded with light, with sensible metamorphoses, with fancies, Lafayette was standing rapt on the deck,

his old veins half-communing unawares with the golden springs of life about him. Soon, however, the landscape changed. The Mississippi was flowing between two groups of ringing hills. Alone and dreaming aloud, Lafayette soliloquized. Suddenly he started. The echo, a clear crystalline echo, was wafting him back his half-uttered words. The air quivered, and the flat and slimy waters too.

DIALOGUE WITH ECHO

"What!" he mused, "what am I doing in this world with my sophistical doubts and torments of the soul? The birds, the serpents, the very mosquitoes live in matter and sun. Joy is their birthright. Only Man, forswearing his full allowance of bread and air, mismates with Concepts, turns aside in pursuit of Visions, drowns himself in Cogitations! Are there then two realities: the sensible and palpable one, and the trigonometric, the intellectual one? And which is the older? which takes precedence? Seraph and flesh, in me how shall they compete?"

ECHO answers: EAT!

"Eat, eat. . . ." he murmured, and all about him, from the entrails of the globe to the vessels of the

firmament, and from the formal to the invisible, in the mite and in the ocean, he saw an incessant interchange of principles and energies, a kind of vast reciprocal assimilation. He murmured: "Yes, *primum vivere*. . . . But the world is a tree that bears fruit only by the sweat of our brow. It is noble to mold matter and train it toward the spirit. If the world is a chaos, is it not man's task to bring reason into it and to crown it with justice? I want adventure, struggle and conquest, and the wine of glory is sweet. I have wanted to embrace the world and I have made revolutions. To live: what is it else but to act? Would you have me, Nature, twirl my thumbs in the vast world and never advance?"

ECHO answers: DANCE!

"Let slaves dance, I must have liberty. Liberty is what makes Man and not, I fancy, a mere sack of cells." But under his eyes, in the golden solitude, every being, tree or cloud, delights in its own substance. There is no question of other laws than organic ones. Creepers are but creepers, and squirrels squirrels. "Liberty! Have I found it?" Long he stood musing, haloed with cruel sun. The mosquitoes floated in space, free. "The winged creatures make no revolutions: inner ones only," he thought. "But

Man, from his origin, bears in his breast the eccentric taste of independence. He dreamed his dream and sought to set himself out of the predestined ways. Between pleasure and bitter care he chooses ever the ideal. Pleasure? the flesh? like slaves? Like gods too, it is true. Ah! the gardens full of children! A woman: what! and nothing beyond, above?"

ECHO answers: LOVE!

The boat swam on, as if sun-bewitched. A crooning rose, somewhere, among the jasmines and the reeds. Schools of pike, drunken and almost supernatural, glided along the keel, pilgrims of the absolute, that is to say, of the belly. The walls of Echo glittered, enchanting him. The forms of things seemed to dissolve in their principles. "Conclude then," ran Lafayette's soliloquy, "that the Universe is a mechanical toy which has been given to me just as it is, without direction. Must I analyze and make a theory of it, or simply play with it? Two attitudes invite me: to accept or to reject. It is not for nothing that to be born is called entering the world. Creation is one and indivisible, all or nothing, and it beckons me to its pearly womb. What is my reply; nay or yea?"

ECHO answers: YEA!

CHAPTER TWELVE

Swan Song

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Swan Song

THE year 1830 was Lafayette's swan song. The culminating and short note, under the sign of the void.

He was in his garden at La Grange, busy grafting a rose-tree. The rose will be the Washington rose. With the end of an infinitesimal knife, delicately he divides the Veronese-green bark of the graft-bearer—a monstrous Virginia eglantine. Then, a swift cut across, and the subject is ready.

At the foot of the rose-tree, in the grass, he has placed the escutcheon—all bare, soft brown, the color of a cello. Lafayette is quite white, clad in trousers of serge and a shirt in squares, his neck open to the roses. The open air brings color to his long, pallid cheeks. His brow shines in the sun. The heat is intense, leaden. It is July 27th, 1830, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Gran'pa! Gran'pa!"

His little blond grandson comes running towards him, at break-neck speed, streaking the gravel with

his red pants. And at the end of his hand he shakes the *Moniteur* of the day to heaven. What ever is the matter to-day?

Lafayette takes the *Moniteur* from his hand. Fat inky letters, a cavalry of letters: "ORDERS!" The liberty of the press is abolished, the Chamber dissolved. Lafayette reads drunkenly, the knife hanging from his fingers. He can see barricades rising before his very eyes in Paris.

The old man of seventy-three—still good for grafting!—goes through the garden, illumined. The red child following him picks up his knife in silence. In the great pond, a swan sings. . . .

Lafayette takes a horse and gallops full speed to Paris.

Like a drowning man who clings to the only straw in the water, like the empty-bagged sportsman who at the end of the day dislodges a wren, like the gambler cleaned out who puts up his supreme stakes—so Lafayette for the last time in his last hour is about to battle for the ideal. The Revolution, liberty, three times strangled and banished, perhaps this time at last, perhaps at last at the age of seventy-three. . . . The devil's luck, eh? For the last time, this old man will try to found a Republic. . . .

He reached Paris at about eight o'clock in the eve-

ning, at the hour when the rays of the setting sun bear for a moment the coolness and splendor of youth and dawn. All day long blood had been running over the summer streets. Marshal Marmont, bombarding the revolutionaries, had closed himself up in the Louvre —a Louvre that was all ears before an obscure Paris. . . .

Green individuals already prowled through the streets, breaking the lamp-posts with stakes. Little by little the shadows were peopled. Women and children, swarming and silent, brought carts, furniture, ironware from nearby. Far as the eye could see, the pavements were being torn up. All night in the mauve obscurity of July, pantomine-crowds built up the barricades in silence. Meager eyes, in pairs, shone through the jungle and the chaos. Young nursing mothers suddenly brought ineffable shimmering breasts into the world. People shook hands heartily along the walls. Printers' shops turned out bundles of tracts full-speed. Here and there in the depths of candle-shops Deputies made speeches, their profiles visible. Passwords, *psst! psst!* made velvet by the shadows, cries uttered through close lips spun across each other, binding the doors, weaving a fabric of the night. Suddenly faces, filing by, grazed the trees. At the corner of pavements, walking wine-shops distributed a free wine, all agleam with stars. An odor of

cheese, of regurgitation and of feet floated over the public places. The whole was invisible, powerful and hot, like blood in the arteries.

As early as five o'clock in the morning, Paris appeared barricaded from end to end: a circle of pavements and fists enveloped the Louvre. In the distance, the reddish mists of fires rose in the cool and naked sky of dawn. The great bell of Notre Dame began to bellow like a bull and buzz like a bee. Suddenly the first fusillade burst forth, ingenuous as the whistling of finches.

Suddenly everything crackled. The army, full and mature, spread out across the Tuileries. The people raised their noses between the stones. The *Glorieuses* pounded full swing. . . .

All day long they shot from shelter, tête-à-tête. Lads eight years old, their lips blackened by cartridges, fired from the tops of trees. From roofs and windows, women and old men sent their bullets spattering one by one. All sorts of old rusty arms emerged from panoplies, from doomsday. Everywhere, behind a shutter, in an air-hole, behind a fence, creatures swift and fierce as foxes, stood with guns at their shoulders. Girls in petticoats loaded the muskets, drew out the cases with their teeth. Forks pierced horses through the chest. The whole partook of heroicomic mas-

querade and re-creation. From early morning to dewy eve.

On the morning of the 29th, the students of the Polytechnical School, breaking down their doors with axes, streamed down the Rue Saint Geneviève, their caps between their teeth, and joined the people. Two regiments of *pioupious* swelled the ranks of the insurgents. The fusillade raged. They brought cannon, harnessed to the giraffes and zebras of the Jardin des Plantes. At eleven o'clock the Louvre was captured. Paris was victorious.

In its hour of victory, Paris turned towards Lafayette, towards "the patriarch of liberty." Lafayette had once more assumed command of the National Guard (always that white horse!). Yet once again, the Destiny of France lay in his hands—in his chaste and sentimental hands.

That day he received the supreme rays of glory. The crowd came to pluck him from his balcony, the girls climbing the grilles, sowing roses on his porch. He set forth for the Hôtel de Ville, arm in arm with the National Guard. Young workmen, wounded, their arms in slings, formed a hedge on either side of him. Hats floated in the air like toy balloons. Old men threw themselves on their knees, their crutches against their hearts. From the heights of balconies,

midinettes threw rivers of ribbons, of pearls and of trimming on the procession. All this under the rays of a great July sky formed and unfolded, on a level with the roofs, under a daïs of birds, an immense living bouquet of silks, of fires and of flesh.

At the Hôtel de Ville, Lafayette met the liberal leaders, Guizot, Lafitte, Benjamin Constant, Casimir-Périer. Every one frittered about in discussion, working, in quest of an idea that fell all roasted from the sky. The Carbonari proclaimed the Republic with loud cries. But the Liberal party, moreover quite camouflaged, was sympathetically inclined towards the Duc d'Orléans. In the absence of any public plan, of any formal leader, a thousand romantic projects floated through all their brains. A spontaneous deputation came to offer the royal crown to Lafayette himself. With his little finger, he flicked this fly away. "A crown," he said, "would suit me as well as a ring suits a cat."

He himself was the most perplexed of them all. His heart was republican, his reason. . . he knew no longer. His grandson, Charles de Rémusat, Minister to the United States, himself voiced *their* opposition to the Republic. But on the square the people were howling: "Vive la République!" Meanwhile Thiers proposed expressly to give the crown to the Duc d'Orléans. People only were in agreement *con*,

against the Bourbons. An emissary came bearing proposals on behalf of Charles X. "It is too late," answered Lafayette. Somebody asked him point-blank: "Will you be President of the Republic?"—"No, certainly not!"—"Well, then, we must put the Duc d'Orléans on the throne." He floated on the tide, his mind deserted. He felt himself sterile, dried up, incapable of thought or action, his nerves giving way, his entrails adrift. An old, an aged man—yes, he was just like those old men sexually low and pallid, lamenting and snivelling because a girl in the full of life caresses them when they are empty. . . .

A thirst came to him for silence and solitude. He escaped from this torrid room and its deliberations, he went away, straight ahead, his eyes half-closed, down innumerable corridors. Some one offered to play guide for him. "Never mind," he replied, "I know the place." Ah, yes, he had known it ever since 1789. Unconsciously he opened a door, entered a little dark room, dead with dust, doubtless a store-room. At last he was alone, by himself. In the corridors, people were looking for him, calling him by name. He savored with delight the knowledge of his inaccessibility for a few minutes—a hare's heart leaps for joy if, for a moment, he can throw the hounds off the scent outside of the earth, virtually deceased. He

paced up and down the room, hilarious and musing. Does not the Republic mean the Jacobins? He saw 1792 once more, bouquet of guillotinades, the prison-cells of Olmütz—a squat Danton lapping blood. . . . And the Duc d'Orléans, why the Duc d'Orléans? His legal mind was opposed to this compromise. He walked up and down, and the noise of his feet on the flagstone filled his skull. Suddenly he felt dazed, as the sepulchral weight of all his seventy-three years descended upon his shoulders. His responsibility appeared to him through the shadows. He felt himself "entrusted with the future fate of his country." These cries "Vive Lafayette" coming to him through the plaster, hurt him. Powerful and impotent as he was, he was conscious of this tragic accumulation on his head. An animal swoon, born of his veins, of his vertebra, invaded his brain. He fell into a cracking chair, he uttered a dry cough, finally a great flow of tears. He sat there weeping, stupidly, livid and naked, in silence, without a sob. . . .

For a long time, he wept, lost in a moon world. Suddenly he awakened. He opened a lynx eye, he drew his watch. Outside, the beast still growled—from behind what cage? He rose, still swaying, but ready for anything. Greater than himself, he felt his seventy-three years all about him, like shadows of

iron. He went out with heavy step from this secret room, this naked room, this confidant. The walls were whiter than shrouds. He walked on. They discovered him, stormed him; for a half-hour, for an hour, they had been looking for him in every nook and cranny. The echoes of the corridors repeated flatly: "Here he is, here he is!" Then: "Vive Lafayette! Vive la République!" He moved forward, born by a thousand arms, swallowed in one gulp by his destiny, indifferent, radiant, erect to the end. They dragged him out on the grand balcony. In the immense dusty and ominous crowd rose a ringing hurrah, hats on the end of pikes, throats to the wind. As for him, he smiled, incapable of thought, beatific, somnambulistic. He felt the hour striking, he knew great things were in store, great unknown events. The cries redoubled: "Vive la République!" As for him, he stood waiting, his hand in his pocket, crumpling an old rose. At this second, the corn on his foot pained him with unbelievable intensity. The nail of his index finger was dirty, luminously dirty. He smiled a dry smile. Beside him stood the Duc d'Orléans, stammering, trying to harangue that populace, to make it his. But far as the eye could see: "Vive la République!" Some one handed Lafayette a tricolor flag. He took it, and then it was an illumination; suddenly possessed by the demon of fine gestures (it was his familiar

demon all his life long), he caught the Duc d'Orléans by the shoulder, advanced with him to the balcony, and half-wrapping him in folds of the vast flag, in front of this sentimental people, as in a dream, he gave him the accolade.

Delighted, the crowd cried jubilantly: "Vive le Duc d'Orléans! Vive le Roi!"

* * *

Old man, you are failing; return to your roses. old man!

* * *

The following morning, he awoke empty, his tongue tasteless. He felt light, happy. In all his fibers, in all his senses he felt the physical sensation of deliverance. The last Lafayettist card had been played and lost—forever. The greatest republican in France had just made a king. . . .

He rose, mechanically, carelessly. He began to whistle like a child, while he shaved. He opened the window, he noted that all July was fragrant. He filled his lungs with a rich, vigorous air. Free. . . . Yes, that was it, he felt himself free. . . .

He took the road to La Grange again quietly.

In the garden, the grafting operation had broken down. Lafayette put on his serge trousers, his chequered shirt he took his infinitesimal knife. The eye

of the rose-tree in the grass was still fresh and rosy. He anointed it with saliva, smoothed it. Then on the graft-bearer he patched up the T-shaped cutting, wet it, sweetened it, spread its lips apart, introduced the bud. He verified the contacts, adjusted the joined barks carefully. And, with one turn of his wrist, he tied the whole thing together, to the palm tree. . . .

In the pool, a swan sang. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Death or the True Life

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Death or the True Life

IN 1834, Lafayette was seventy-seven years old. Had this old man of seventy-seven lived?

He lived his life at twenty,—the space of a star, of a shooting-star. He lived his life in America, three hardy, heroic, petulant years. Thereafter, he moved from check to check, from eclipse to eclipse, from dregs to dregs; it was one long tumble . . . 1792, the Empire, Carbonarism: so many failures. . . .

From 1792 on, he spent his life beginning over again. It was like Sisyphus and his rock. He failed at everything: glory, love, everything. . . . A failure. . . .But one day glory, love, dreams, the natural destiny of man, the *rights of man*, too, one day these arose from out their bonds and chains, they apostrophized the victor, they asked him for an account; the phantasm seized reality by the throat shook it and strangled it.

That day was the day of death. . . .

* * *

One morning in May, the month when Nature's graces are blithe to wear a brilliant coverlet of frost, he caught cold. He caught cold as he was returning from a cemetery.

On May 9th, he went to bed. On May 19th, his death agony began.

His agony, or the Revolution of his dreams. . . .

He lies there. A sick room is so much like a desert of palms, Death, a life which sinks in the sands. . . . Great walls of white sheets, horizontal women. It smells of diluents, children and sickness. The vast spectacle of a crucifix. Lafayette, his orbits laid bare, drifts slowly away. . . .

It began with the eyes. Stiff on his back, he stared at the ceiling. The whiteness insensibly grew animate, peopled. One by one shadows took birth there, silhouettes, wise and processional. They throbbed, played their rôle for a moment on the plaster and passed on. It was a procession of possibilities.

All that man covets and dreams, between the cradle and the grave, all that is not limbo, the brilliant appetites of his most secret flesh, the prayers of his entrails, the illustrious hopes of his imagination, all that he conquered, proclaimed, lamented, chimæra, images, fables, lures—now ultimately all this takes shape, all this applies itself once more for the great rendezvous. In a trice, all of them stand there. What a source

of sprites the failing, mossy body is! Outside, above the clay, and like butterflies out of the chrysalis, the dreams with their Achilles' heel arise: here are pale desires, no longer curbed, here are the absolute needs of the heart, and at last the great golden-headed desire. . . . The procession of possibilities. . . .

It is a dazzling virgin forest, all ashine with glaze. Stark, vast spaces filled with trees of Liberty. Between the lines float flags with forty-eight stars. The petals of flowers are characters of printing and each flower spells a word: Liberty. Forget-me-nots dot the grasses. It is on the American continent. A tall Virginia planter, as like Washington as one drop of water is to another, walks along between the maple trees. He leads by the hand a little girl of seven or eight years of age, in a red scarf and poke-bonnet, called Liberty. She grows before one's eyes, she assumes mundial proportions, and when at last she has become a true giantess, Washington plants her in bronze before New York harbor. . . .

But white sprites hopping, from branch to branch, extinguish the flowers and saw down the trees clean. Everything crumbles, and from between the ruins issues incontinent a king, fat and stocky. Washington changes into Louis XVI. The King: an honest bourgeois in his shell, tender, just, and public property, "the best prince of his family, the best in Europe,"

yes, alas! sentimental, obviously (the lachrymose sentimentality of the Eighteenth Century, the worst of all sentimentalities), debonair and not unlike a cucumber (for it was he who started the Revolution, Louis XVI), too much belly, moreover (the belly invites lightning)—a kindly man at bottom, but not two pence worth of majesty. (Is not the métier of king a psychologic métier?) A click, as in the cinema. No more king. In his place rises a superb effigy of a white horse, and on the white horse, Lafayette. Acclamations. The people in the background. On a tricolor calico, the legend:

LAFAYETTE I, PRESIDENT
OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

. . . He starts up in bed, raises his head, blinks his eyes, to the right, to the left. . . . But there is only a room, rich and mortuary. A purring of women softens the air. It is the warm dense oily atmosphere of virgin forests rubbered with coolness. One hears the flight of death. . . . Ah, the stinking heat of beds!

Now the sick man grows drowsy, he enters the realm of marvels. His motor-system purrs like a cat. He lies on his bed, and the sheet on this harmonious human framework is like an atlas. His shoulders, in

relief, are Alps. The morning flocking of the hills. Between the peninsulas of his thighs, the Black Sea. Vast cereal flanks. His knees are peaks. A stiff leg moves feebly, like a tide. . . . With one kick, a splendid leg emerges from under the sheets, yonder, like a golden island. . . .

He dozes, he is half-asleep, now looming high, now sinking low. . . . Suddenly he half-rises; on the broken bed, in his shirt like an armor, crying:

"Soldiers, help!"

A windmill turns in the void, the mill of Valmy, Ah, that regret, over a whole lifetime, at having missed Valmy! So it was a lie! Here is the Battle of Valmy, the true one, and here is General Lafayette winning it. "Soldiers!" He sparkles on his fetid pillow. His fingers tighten, around . . . a sword? a handkerchief? . . . The Volunteers of '92 come in through the window. Italy is a sackful of victories. One hears the fat drums of the Old Guard. Is it Austerlitz? . . . Or Wagram? . . . And that warbling lad, astride over a wall of mint? . . . Somebody off-stage: "Marshal Lafayette, I am proud of you!"

He capers. . . or rather, he rises on his elbows. How hot it is on that flat bed! Sweat streams down his cheeks. His flaming arteries beat the tattoo of the charge. His breast cleaves immobility. Ah, how young Victory makes one! . . . The old man of

seventy-seven, all moist in his wooly shirt, scintillates. There, planted on his dry elbows, his eyes to heaven, all his body shaken by transports, he laughs, pants, steams, burns. . . .

All May penetrates through the window. It is a green square turning capers and singing, with a blue square for hat. The window-panes magnify and are half kaleidoscopic. All this high town-garden, with its magical and dull verdure, makes a summery counterpoise to the bare room. Further on, as in the paintings of the Primitives, one divines a whole mystical nature, fields squared out with absolute exactitude, trellises that buzz; further still, the classic watery prairie, with jonquils of enamel, and, right in the middle, a bottle-green frog croaking fit to break the ear-drums. . . .

A magnolia-branch skims the window-panes, hard as a crystal. It appears in detail, mossy and rough, on the rainy side, soft below like thighs. One discerns the leaves, orderly in their appointed places, stalks hanging as from a ring, like a picture transferred to glass.

On this branch two pearly bulfinches chase each other with May cries. Male and female, one with hard plumage, the other under a soft headdress, play the pure game of love in the warm air. He, stupid

and don't-care-a-damn, approaches the young female stealthily, with little jumps, chewing a worm. . . . And suddenly he makes a bound, bursting with desire. But the innocent has foreseen his zeal. With a pirouette she eludes the attack, she swerves sidewise, malignant, dry-eyed.

It is the month of May. Louis-Philippe I, King of the French, picks a posy of roses. He is placid; Lafayette's funeral will go by between bayonets. Already Chateaubriand is meditating his phrase: ". . . at the top of the Boulevard, the hearse stopped. I saw it, gilded with a fugitive beam of sunlight, shining above helmets and spears. Then the shadow fell once more, and he disappeared." It is the month of May. Yonder in Virginia, a weeping man digs the soil, he fills a bag of American earth; it is already known that the national mourning will last thirty days. It is the month of May.

Drunk with glory, drunk with dreams, Lafayette lies on his bed, palpitant. A rosy glow illumines his pointed cheek-bones. For an instant the dry skin of the old man flames. A last flow of saps, more from the brain than of the blood, rushes through his veins. It is the month of May.

From glory to love, and from bird to man is but a step. Now his senses enter the mêlée. Now, above

the dying man the ceiling grows cool and green. One by one, a thousand weeping-willows rise.

All these women he never possessed, those he thought were vanished, here they come, punctual, avid and tremulous. How sensitive and downy is the flesh tonight! This old immobile man feels his brow aflame. A sacred fever colors his brain. He trembles, parched with evil. His bones under the delicate sheets shake impotently. His mouth yawns with a sad, mute covetousness. He stretches his arms in cross-shape on his bed of agony in a vast attitude of pleasure. From the lees of his entrails, in this final moment rises a supreme heat, as a wanton fire rises from a cemetery, the pale ultimate chant of ancient voluptuousness. This evening the flesh calls them forth, one by one, monstrously, out of their long exile. . . .

There they stand more desirable than ever, the limpid females whom he passed by on his way through the world. Here is Simiane. She bends over him, soft, languorous. Her breasts are rays of light. His heart beats like lead. Lafayette seizes her. How she sinks in the crook of his arm! They lie lip to lip.

Lafayette moans and groans on his eternal couch.

A sob is heard rolling across the room like a pearl. At his bed-side, a daughter bows over a pulse. . . . The noise of a spoon in a bowl. . . a great white bowl that drinks up one's eyes. Marie-Antoinette's? He

sees Marie-Antoinette again at Trianon, seated on beech-leaves. She plays with her heart and on her left wrist she bears an inscription written in blackberry-juice *JE T'AIME.* Trianon!

There on a branch through the window-pane are the two amorous birds still. Now the male, in high good humor, feigns the finest carelessness. He preens himself on a mad sprig, he sharpens his beak on the bark. As for her, nothing occupies her attention now, she surrenders to the warm air, to all the beatitude of the weather. There she is, bent, immobile, suave, her neck swollen, her tongue to the sky. She blinks her eyes, prepares for sleep. . . . Meanwhile, our rascal, in heat. . . .

Marie-Antoinette is seated on the grass, Lafayette caresses her. Their breath mingles, they are one flame. . . . The male polishes his beak, with a long stealthy glance. . . .

As for Lafayette, amid the leaves, under the cry of a bulfinch, he gathers Marie-Antoinette to him with a great cry of delight. . . .

But who is this? What? The little girl of sixteen he met one morning in the pearly woods of Chavaniac. She still has an acorn-cup in her hand and she smells of goat-cheese. But to-day her rosy cheeks are near, near. Lafayette hugs her in his warm child's

arms. They sip each other's lips, their teeth strike each other, like young, suckling kids. Now they are but one shape in the myrtles. . . . A virgin, yes, she was a virgin. . . .

And on this moist bed, the old bony body already half-corpse is in heart-rending contrast to the spirit, dreaming of love.

Now a calm. . . . The door opens, three tall smooth-shaven men enter. They wear clothes made overseas, their faces are gray, their hair stiff. One feels them fashioned of phlegm, of sentimental flesh, of virile sentiment. They are presented to Lafayette. The dying man's celestial smile hovers over his thick bed. America. . . . Liberty. . . . A sort of cry from the depths, the breath of a cry escapes from his discolored lips: "The British are in the soup." He raises his nose, shudders with a long screech of his nails. . . . The three men go out in silence. The Virginian bears a sack full of Virginia earth in his hands; they will mix this handful of earth with the French earth in the grave already dug in the Cemetery of Picpus. The Marquis de La Fayette, conqueror of Virginia, will rest for all eternity in Franco-American earth. . . .

A spasm of trembling, in fits and starts, seizes the dying man. He grows delirious apace, with a cracking of joints, heavy breaks. In the room, the two

daughters of the General sway like weeping willows. In starts, he is choking, he is going into eclipse; then he rises like a bloodless apparition, with an oblique finger he points to the imaginary: "There! Over there! There they are!" Thus, rigid for a moment, he apostrophizes space, with glairs spouting like gargoyles in his voice. Then he falls back again, barren, into his yawning bed.

All the anguish of man in the face of death, more, the anguish of humanity. . . .

Meanwhile from a contraction and a play of his orbits, one feels the end approaching. Infinite pauses alternate with brusque excesses. The old man has the death-rattle, he foams at the mouth in the august, sepulchral air; at the window, the two birds chirp at the great sky. The theme of love and the theme of death intermingle with a tranquil cruelty. Little by little, a sort of rhythm in double time, life, death, life, death, takes possession of the being. "O my beloved. . . Liberty. . . ." His lips grow eloquently confused. His glance grows moist, it sinks. . . . Now outside is the moment when the male with one leap falls on his prey with a fine tottering cry. And bound together, the zigzag on the tender branch, delicate and shining in the pure sky, falling, gleaming, with clash of feathers, with paw-like oglings, with death-rattles, one vast drama of the senses.

Finally they are a single shape, they form one ball of pleasure, with a fine chirrup, for the span of a rose.

A chirruping, and, in the bed, a great nervous tremor, a vast gaping cry, half-spasm, half-cough. . . . He passes.

It is the month of May. . . .

* * *

Lafayette, here, here is Liberty!